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**Notes:**

Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.

Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

## ANSWERS

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ **Horizon IT system: Compensation**

**Sarah Dyke:**

[\[6668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he expects people affected by failures in the Post Office Horizon IT system to receive compensation by March 2025.

**Gareth Thomas:**

Government is committed to providing redress to individuals affected by the Horizon scandal as quickly as possible. We continue to seek options to speed up redress, in discussion with the Horizon Compensation Advisory Board. For example, on the Horizon Convictions Redress Scheme we have recently committed to providing offers on fully completed claims within 40 working days in 90% of cases, in line with our commitment on the GLO scheme. As of 30 September 2024, approximately £363 million has been paid to over 2,900 claimants across the available schemes.

Setting a target of March 2025 for every sub-postmaster affected by failures in the Horizon Scandal to receive compensation in full could put pressure on vulnerable postmasters who may need more time to finalise their claim with their legal representatives, or to respond to offers. It could also rule out new potential claimants, who are still coming forward.

#### ■ **New Businesses: Mid Cheshire**

**Andrew Cooper:**

[\[7063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what (a) financial and (b) other steps his Department is taking to encourage the creation of businesses in Mid Cheshire constituency.

**Gareth Thomas:**

The creation of new businesses is essential to our economic success.

The Government will boost small business growth and productivity by delivering upon the commitments within Labour's pre-election nine-point pledge - Plan for Small Business.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund provides £31million for Cheshire & Warrington, including support to Mid Cheshire businesses. The Department also provides core funding to the local Growth Hub operating across Cheshire & Warrington.

Additionally, all businesses can access support through the Business Support Service, the GOV.UK website, Help to Grow and the Government-backed British Business Bank.

**■ Overseas Trade: Forced Labour****Sir Iain Duncan Smith:**[\[5827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the report entitled Classification of the audit at SAIC-Volkswagen (Xinjiang) Automotive Ltd, published in September 2024, what steps the Government is taking to ensure products entering UK markets do not use forced labour in their supply chains; and if he will have discussions with counterparts in China on ensuring the accuracy of audits for the purposes of ensuring that products being sold in the UK do not use forced labour in their production.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

No company should have forced labour in its supply chains. This Government is committed to working with international partners and businesses to ensure global supply chains are free from human and labour rights abuses. The Government is reviewing how we can best tackle forced labour in supply chains.

The UK consistently raises human rights issues at the highest levels with the Chinese authorities. The Government's overseas business risk guidance sets out the risks of operating in Xinjiang and urges UK companies to conduct appropriate due diligence and consider their corporate responsibilities when making business decisions.

**■ Post Offices: Rural Areas****James Cartlidge:**[\[6338\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to support rural post offices.

**Gareth Thomas:**

There are over 11,500 post office branches in the UK – over half are in rural areas – which the Government supports through an annual £50m network subsidy to ensure the viability of rural and community branches.

Government further works to ensure Post Office Limited maintains a minimum number of branches and a geographical spread of branches in line with published access criteria. The access criteria ensure that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens .

**■ Small Businesses: Audit****Mark Garnier:**[\[6186\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he plans to change the threshold of full audit requirements for smaller businesses.

**Justin Madders:**

The qualifying criteria that determine company size for the purposes of accounting and audit have not changed in over a decade. It is right that these thresholds are reviewed periodically so they are set at appropriate levels.

Company size thresholds are being considered as part of the Government's broader non-financial reporting review, intended to ensure that more companies are able to benefit from simpler reporting and accounting frameworks, as well as take advantage of the small company exemption from statutory audit.

## CABINET OFFICE

### ■ 10 Downing Street: Energy

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** [\[6196\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much was spent on energy bills for the residential section of 10 Downing Street in the last year.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** [\[6197\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much was spent on energy bills for the residential section of 11 Downing Street in the last year.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Downing Street estate is metered as one and no residential split is available.

### ■ Cabinet Committees

**John Glen:** [\[5295\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when the Prime Minister intends to publish the List of Cabinet Committees.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Cabinet Committee list has been published to Parliament via a Written Ministerial Statement and publicly on GOV.UK.

### ■ Cabinet Office and Prime Minister: Travel

**John Glen:** [\[5291\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 30 July 2024 to Question 935 on Ministers and Senior Civil Servants: Travel, if he will publish the (a) Cabinet Office and (b) 10 Downing Street policy on (i) business and (ii) first class travel for (A) Ministers, (B) civil servants and (C) special advisers.

**Ellie Reeves:**

The relevant codes of conduct, which contain further details on travel policy, are published online. Relevant parts include section 10 of the Ministerial Code and section 8.2 of the Civil Service Management Code.

Departmental guidance, where applicable, is published on the relevant intranets.

**■ Cabinet Office: Email****John Glen:** [\[5309\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister uses an email account in the course of his duties.

**Georgia Gould:**

As part of a modern working environment, Ministers, including the Prime Minister, receive advice and communicate with officials, advisers and others through secure electronic channels.

**■ Cabinet Office: National Security****John Glen:** [\[5304\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether steps are being taken to ensure he is briefed personally by the Security Services on national security matters.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

The Prime Minister, as part of long standing practice, receives regular briefings on national security matters, including at meetings attended by the Security Services.

**■ Civil Servants: Trade Union Officials****John Glen:** [\[5290\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 30 July 2024 to Question 943 on Civil Service: Trade Union Officials, what plans his Department has to review its policy on (a) collating and (b) publishing facility time transparency data.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017 apply to Civil Service departments and set out the expectations around the collation and transparency requirements for paid facility time information. The Government is committed to repealing the Trade Union Act and further information will be published in due course.

**■ Civil Service: Equality****John Glen:** [\[5288\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department has received representations from trade unions on civil service (a) external spending on equality, diversity and inclusion policies, (b) staff responsible for equality, diversity and inclusion policies, (c) diversity networks and (d) guidance on equality, diversity and inclusion policies since 4 July 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Cabinet Office discusses many different workforce matters with Civil Service trade unions as part of regular discussions.



**Julia Buckley:** [\[5488\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to continue with the implementation of the Civil Service EDI Expenditure Guidance.

**Georgia Gould:**

The controls outlined in the Civil Service Equality Diversity and Inclusion Expenditure Guidance which was published on 14 May remain in place.

## ■ **Elon Musk**

**John Glen:** [\[5296\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister has plans to meet Elon Musk.

**Georgia Gould:**

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations are published on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) as part of the government's transparency agenda.

## ■ **Housing: Construction**

**John Glen:** [\[5575\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what data the Office for National Statistics holds on the differences in net housing delivery between (a) England and (b) Wales in (i) absolute terms and (b) per capita since 2010.

**Georgia Gould:**

The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority.

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 12th September is attached.

**Attachments:**

1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ5575 (1).pdf]

## ■ **Independent Adviser On Ministers' Interests**

**John Glen:** [\[5293\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 31 July 2024 to Question 1237 on Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests, whether the Independent Adviser will (a) accept and (b) review complaints on ministerial conduct; and whether he will be able to initiate investigations.

**Georgia Gould:**

This Government is committed to ensuring that the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests has the powers to start investigations into misconduct and that they will have access to the evidence they need. Further detail on this will be set out in due course.

**■ Lord Alli****John Glen:** [5574]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether Lord Alli has financed any hospitality receptions in 10 Downing Street since 4 July 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

As under previous Administrations, party political receptions are not a matter for the Government. Details of official receptions are published in quarterly transparency returns on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

**■ Lord Alli: 10 Downing Street****Sir Gavin Williamson:** [6195]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many times Lord Alli has entered 10 Downing Street since 5 July 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

I refer the Rt Hon Members to the answer given by the then Prime Minister on 7 February 2017, Official Report, PQ 62542.

Following the practice followed by past administrations, the Government does not comment on security matters.

**■ Prime Minister: Civil Servants and Special Advisers****John Glen:** [5305]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the core working hours are for (a) permanent civil servants and (b) special advisers in 10 Downing Street.

**Georgia Gould:**

Expected working hours are set out for all Cabinet Office employees in their terms and conditions of employment.

**■ Prime Minister: Donors****Kit Malthouse:** [5598]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what meetings the Prime Minister has had with (a) individuals, (b) trade unions and (c) organisations who have previously made political donations to (i) him and (ii) his constituency association.

**Georgia Gould:**

As was the practice under the previous Administration, details of the Prime Minister's official engagements with external individuals and organisations will be published in the quarterly transparency returns on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

### ■ Prime Minister: Staff

**John Glen:** [\[5308\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether 10 Downing Street has a workplace dress code for staff.

**Georgia Gould:**

For management and staffing purposes the Prime Minister's Office is part of the Cabinet Office. As was the case under the previous administration, there is no specific workplace dress code policy. Civil servants are expected to dress appropriately for work.

### ■ Prime Minister: Written Questions

**John Glen:** [\[5578\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the clearance process is for responses in the Prime Minister's name to written Parliamentary Questions.

**Georgia Gould:**

It has been the case under all Administrations that ministers, including Prime Ministers, are responsible for written PQ answers in their names.

### ■ Prime Minister's Chief of Staff: Civil Servants

**John Glen:** [\[5307\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet, how many full-time equivalent civil servants support the work of the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff.

**Georgia Gould:**

For management and staffing purposes the Prime Minister's Office is part of the Cabinet Office. All staff in the Prime Minister's Office support the work of the Prime Minister to ensure the effective running of government.

### ■ Prime Minister's Chief of Staff: Workplace Pensions

**John Glen:** [\[5292\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff is currently in receipt of (a) a Civil Service and (b) an other public service pension; and if she will now accrue additional monetary value to her existing Civil Service pension as a special adviser.

**Georgia Gould:**

It is longstanding policy not to discuss the pension arrangements of individuals.

### ■ Senior Civil Servants: Pay

**John Glen:** [\[5282\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Practitioner guidance on the 2024-24 Senior Civil Service Pay Framework, published on 30 July 2024, whether he

made an assessment of the potential merits of making civil service pay increases contingent on increases in productivity.

**Georgia Gould:**

Senior Civil Service (SCS) pay is subject to an independent pay review body process. This year the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) recommended an award of 5 per cent for all members of the SCS. The Government accepted this SSRB recommendation in full. In addition, departments can award one-off non-consolidated performance related bonuses to members of the SCS to recognise high performance and delivery of objectives.

■ **Special Advisers: Conduct**

**John Glen:**

[\[5283\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the proposed Ethics and Integrity Commission will have a remit in relation to the conduct of special advisers.

**Georgia Gould:**

To ensure the government is held to the highest standards the government will establish a new independent Ethics and Integrity Commission, with its own independent Chair, to ensure probity in government.

We will provide an update in due course.

■ **Special Advisers: Recruitment**

**John Glen:**

[\[5301\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what his policy is on the number of special advisers (a) Cabinet Ministers and (b) Ministers of State attending Cabinet can appoint.

**Georgia Gould:**

Cabinet Ministers and Ministers who regularly attend Cabinet may appoint special advisers. All special adviser appointments require approval of the Prime Minister.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Film and Television: Employment**

**Dame Caroline Dinenage:**

[\[6038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of jobs that are supported by the film and TV industry.

**Chris Bryant:**

The film and TV sector forms a critical part of UK society, democracy and its creative industries. DCMS estimates that the number of filled jobs within the film and TV industry is [182,000](#), as of the 2023-2024 financial year. The Government is committed to continue supporting growth and job creation in this sector.

## ■ Pigeon Racing

**Robin Swann:**

[\[7307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will discuss with Sport England the potential merits of recognising pigeon racing as a sport.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

Pigeon Racing is not recognised as a sport by Sport England, and we have no plans to discuss that further with them.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Armed Forces: Housing

**Alex Baker:**

[\[1612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of armed forces accommodation in Aldershot constituency; and what plans he has to improve that accommodation.

**Luke Pollard:**

There are 3,406 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties in Aldershot, and it is assessed that 3,290 (96.6%) of these currently meet or exceed the Government wide Decent Homes standard. However, the Ministry of Defence recognises poor quality housing is an issue for Service Families and continues to champion investment to improve this.

There are 4,657 Single Living Accommodation (SLA) bedspaces in Aldershot, of which 3,077 (66%) are assessed as Grade One (the highest grade) for condition. SLA within Aldershot is maintained in good condition under the Project Allenby Connaught Private Finance Initiative. SLA at Gibraltar Barracks is maintained in good condition under the Holdfast Training Services Public Private Partnership. An SLA Expert Group, including Defence Infrastructure Organisation and Top Level Budget representatives is continuing to evolve Defence Minimum Standard measures to improve the quality of SLA.

There are no major works planned on SFA or SLA in the current financial year.

### ■ Defence: Expenditure

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[3741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has made changes to the threshold of financial approvals for defence expenditure requiring ministerial sign off.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Department continues to keep its financial position under review given the scale of the financial pressure across Government. This has included some targeted additional controls on committing spend to ensure effective prioritisation. The

introduction of revised thresholds for Ministerial approval to ensure spend continues to support defence priorities.

### ■ Israel: Military Intelligence

**Jeremy Corbyn:** [\[5252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) intelligence the Government is sharing with Israel on the potential location of remaining UK national hostages in Gaza and (b) other intelligence the Government is sharing with Israel gathered from surveillance flights from RAF Akrotiri.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** [\[5253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment the Government has made of the potential impact of Israel's use of surveillance data provided by the UK on the UK's role in ensuring adherence to international law.

**Luke Pollard:**

The unarmed UK surveillance aircraft are employed solely to support hostage rescue. Only information relating to hostage rescue will be passed to the relevant Israeli authorities responsible for hostage rescue.

We are unable comment further on detailed intelligence matters for operational security reasons.

### ■ Ministry of Defence: Land

**Alex Baker:** [\[7038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many child play areas there are across the defence estate; and what the annual cost is of their upkeep.

**Luke Pollard:**

There are 618 play areas across the defence estate. It is not possible to break down the annual cost of their upkeep as their maintenance forms part of the wider Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) contracts and it is not possible to isolate these specific costs.

### ■ Ministry of Defence: Recruitment

**James Cartlidge:** [\[6337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will publish a list of the recruitment policies that he plans to scrap.

**Luke Pollard:**

We are ambitious in our work to review and, where appropriate, challenge previous regulations for Armed Forces recruiting. As part of this work, a number of medical entry policy revisions have been published in Joint Service Publication 950, Armed Forces Medical Policy. Additional regulations concerning eligibility requirements, plus those supporting Armed Forces recruitment processes will be revised and promulgated once finalised.

## ■ Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Industrial Disputes

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[7192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the impact of industrial action at the Royal Fleet Auxiliary on the (a) Royal Fleet Auxiliary, (b) Royal Navy and (c) Royal Marines; and what steps he is taking to end that industrial action.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) continues to engage with the Maritime Trade Unions (MTUs), who represent members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA), to discuss a resolution to the on-going RFA pay dispute.

The MOD operates a whole force model, bringing military, civilian and contracted staff together to deliver its defence outcomes; we continue to proactively collaborate with our stakeholders and partners to sustain outputs whilst discussions with the MTUs remain ongoing.

The MOD continues to work with both MTUs to resolve the on-going RFA pay dispute whilst mitigating potential impact of strike action to ensure that the Royal Navy continues to deliver its maritime commitments.

## ■ Skynet

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[6343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of (a) Airbus Defence and (b) Space UK on the launch of the SKYNET 6A satellite.

**Luke Pollard:**

There have been no direct Secretary of State discussions with either Airbus Defence or Space X on the launch of the Skynet 6A satellite. However, the Skynet delivery team remain in regular contact with all parties involved to ensure that progress to a timely and successful launch remains on-track.

## ■ Type 32 Frigates: Design and Procurement

**Graeme Downie:**

[\[3599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his planned timetable is for the (a) design and (b) procurement of Type 32 frigates.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Type 32 frigate programme remains in the concept phase and has not yet reached the level of maturity to allow publication of a specific design and procurement timetable.

**■ Ukraine: Military Aid****Alicia Kearns:** [\[5390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many gas masks the UK (a) has provided and (b) plans to provide to Ukraine.

**Luke Pollard:**

Since 2022 the Ministry of Defence has provided 8,500 Respirators to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The MOD continues to assess and monitor the threat environment in Ukraine, including Russia's use of chemicals as a method of warfare and works closely with our international partners to coordinate counter-CBRN support and assistance.

**■ Yemen: Military Intervention****Mary Glendon:** [\[6220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the UK is carrying out airstrikes in Yemen.

**Luke Pollard:**

The situation in the Red Sea remains extremely serious. The Houthis continue to conduct illegal and dangerous attacks that risk innocent lives, exacerbate the humanitarian suffering in Yemen, threaten regional security and harm the global economy.

In response to the Houthi attacks, the Royal Air Force conducted five self-defensive strikes against Houthi targets between January and May, acting alongside the United States, with non-operational support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, and New Zealand.

**EDUCATION****■ Children: Poverty****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[6512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take to monitor the effectiveness of her Department's work to support the mental health of children in poverty in (a) schools and (b) other educational settings.

**Stephen Morgan:**

This government is committed to improving mental health support for all children and young people. This is critical to breaking down barriers to opportunity and learning.

The right support should be available to every young person that needs it, which is why the department will provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school.



The government will also be putting in place new Young Futures hubs, including access to mental health support workers, and will recruit an additional 8,500 new mental health staff to treat children and adults.

To improve children's mental health, this government is committed to tackling child poverty and alleviating the impact of poverty on families. Child poverty has gone up by 700,000 since 2010, with over four million children now growing up in a low-income family. For too many children, living in poverty robs them of the opportunity to learn and to prosper.

The government's Child Poverty Taskforce have already started the urgent work to publish its Child Poverty Strategy in spring 2025. The taskforce will drive forward short- and long-term actions across government to reduce child poverty. Further details on the taskforce can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/child-poverty-taskforce-kicks-off-urgent-work-to-publish-strategy-in-spring>.

Alongside these efforts to tackle the root causes of child poverty, the department also makes use of key national data sets to look at children and young living in economic disadvantage. For example, the department collects its own data set on children and young people's wellbeing via the Parent, pupil and learner voice panel survey and provides representative data multiple times a year, including splits by subgroups such as for pupils eligible for free school meals. The department has previously also used data from sources such as the Programme for International Student Assessment, the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey, and the Health Behaviours of School Aged Children study to understand trends in children's mental health and wellbeing over time and difference for different groups. The department will continue to use these and to explore new ways to measure the impact of its commitments to lift children out of poverty.

## ■ Film: Work Experience

**Tom Hayes:**

**[5456]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing support for workplace exchange programmes in the visual effects and post-production sector; and whether she is taking steps to encourage industry experts in that sector to provide vocational training.

**Janet Daby:**

The creative industries play a vital role in our economy and our nation's cultural life. Making sure that the UK can provide a workforce with the right skills and capabilities is key to capturing the huge growth potential of the creative industries. The department recognises the importance of getting the right expertise into the classroom and the role that industry exchange has in making that happen.

Through the Local Skills Improvement Fund, the department has enabled further education (FE) providers to engage in two-way exchange with industry, building up long-lasting networks with employers. This could include, for example, employers

hosting webinars, delivering guest seminars in their local FE provider, or inviting students and teachers to observe latest industry practice. Additionally, the Taking Teaching Further programme continues to support FE providers to recruit and provide early career support to those with the relevant knowledge and/or industry experience to retrain as FE teachers, aiming to boost the quality and industry-relevance of teaching. The national FE teacher recruitment campaign specifically targets industry professionals and encourages them to share their skills by considering a career in FE teaching. The department will continue to support the introduction of industry experts into vocational courses to share their skills and experience.

## ■ Schools: Transport

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[6638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's guidance for local authorities entitled Travel to school for children of compulsory school age, published in January 2024, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of Part 1: Local authorities, statutory duty in relation to eligible school children.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department's home to school transport policy aims to make sure that no child is prevented from accessing education due to a lack of transport. Local authorities must arrange free travel to school for children of compulsory school age, 5 to 16, who attend their nearest school and would not be able to walk there because of the distance, their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, or because the nature of the route means it would be unsafe for them to do so.

The department formally consulted on the statutory guidance for local authorities in 2019, and continued to engage with key partners until the updated guidance was published in June 2023. We continue to engage with local authorities on a regular basis on this issue.

## ■ Special Educational Needs

**Sir Julian Smith:**

[\[6213\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to continue the reforms set out in the SEND and alternative provision improvement plan.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Too many families and schools are struggling to secure the provision and support they need to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and outcomes for children with SEND have suffered for far too long. This government's ambition is to ensure that all children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life.

The department is committed to taking a community-wide approach, improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools. We also want to ensure that special

schools cater to those with the most complex needs. Whilst we recognise the urgency and need to drive improvements, we are conscious that there are no quick fixes and want to take a considered approach to deliver sustainable education reform.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:**

[\[6273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department collects data on the average time SEND pupils spend in isolation across England.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department does not collect data on the average time pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) spend in isolation across England.

In July 2022, the department published the updated 'Behaviour in Schools' guidance, which is the primary source of advice for schools on developing and implementing a behaviour policy. This updated guidance provides clarity and support to schools on removing pupils from the classroom, which includes advice that schools should collect, monitor and analyse data about this intervention. This information should help schools to make data-based decisions about any additional support individual pupils may require, and to identify whether the school's removal policy is having a disproportionate impact on pupils sharing particular characteristics.

Schools have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to take such steps as is reasonable to avoid any substantial disadvantage to SEND pupils caused by the school's policies or practices. Within these legal parameters, it is then for individual schools to develop their own policies.

Any school behaviour policy must be lawful, proportionate and reasonable and comply with the school's duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Account must be taken of a pupil's age, any SEND they may have, and any religious requirements affecting them.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ Community Energy

**Helen Hayes:**

[\[6330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to enable community energy schemes to sell their power to local residents.

**Michael Shanks:**

Community energy will play an essential role in meeting our mission for clean power by 2030.

Great British Energy will provide support to deliver the Local Power Plan, putting communities at the heart of restructuring our energy economy. Through partnering with and providing funding and support to Community Energy Groups, the Local Power Plan will roll out small and medium-scale renewable energy projects, using

established technologies to develop up to 8GW of cheaper, cleaner power. This will include shared ownership projects in partnership with private developers.

Some suppliers already offer local tariffs, and other products and services are available that provide community benefits. Small-scale generation sites can benefit from an exemption, which means that they do not require a licence from Ofgem to generate electricity or to supply to local customers. Ofgem has further flexibility to award supply licences to generation sites that are above the exemptions threshold when they are restricted to specified local area.

## ■ Energy: Infrastructure

**Mr Luke Charters:**

[\[7066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when his Department plans to next update the National Policy Statement for energy infrastructure; and whether that update will include battery storage as significant energy infrastructure.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Chancellor committed to Government updating relevant National Policy Statements (NPSs) for infrastructure within 12-months and this includes reviewing the energy NPSs.

This Government recognises that batteries have a key role to play in decarbonising the power sector by 2030 through balancing the electricity system and facilitating the integration of renewable power. Batteries above 50MW formerly fell under the regime but this was not found to expedite planning decisions. The policy will be kept under review.

## ■ Insulation: Housing

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[\[6754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what his planned timetable is for rolling out home insulation upgrades.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

Our Warm Homes Plan will transform homes across the country by making them cheaper and cleaner to run, rolling out upgrades from new insulation to solar and heat pumps. We have already launched the Warm Homes Plan: Local Grant, a government-funded scheme delivered by Local Authorities that will take the first steps to delivering on the ambitions of the Warm Homes Plan. It will provide grants for energy performance upgrades and low carbon heating to low-income households living in the worst quality, privately owned homes in England to achieve energy bill savings and carbon savings. These upgrades will be open to all fuel types, including on gas households (those heated by mains gas), and off gas households (those heated by electricity, oil, coal, or liquid petroleum gas). We will set out the full details of our ambitious Warm Homes Plan next spring.

## ■ Offshore Industry: Licensing

**Richard Burgon:**

[\[6315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when his Department plans to launch a consultation on its policy on not issuing new oil and gas licences to explore new fields.

**Michael Shanks:**

We plan to consult later this year on the implementation of our manifesto position not to issue new oil and gas licences to explore new fields.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ Agriculture: Capital Investment

**Graham Stuart:**

[\[5935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to approve Tranche 2 funding for Asset Repair and Improvement.

**Emma Hardy:**

Protecting communities from flooding is a key priority for this Government, and that is why we have launched a Flood Resilience Taskforce. It will provide oversight of national and local flood resilience and preparedness ahead of and after the winter flood season. It met for the first time on 12 September to discuss preparation for the winter ahead.

The Internal Drainage Board (IDB) Fund will support our farmers and rural communities from the impacts of flooding by providing grants to IDBs. The Environment Agency has confirmed Tranche 1 allocations, which provides financial support for storm recovery following the wet weather and flooding during winter 2023/24. They are in the process of making payments to the successful IDBs. We will update the IDBs on Tranche 2 in due course.

### ■ Agriculture: Environment Protection

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[6335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help incentivise farmers to take part in (a) rewilding schemes, (b) soil health restoration and (c) improving biodiversity.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

This Government is incentivising farmers to take part in rewilding schemes, soil health restoration and improving biodiversity through Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pays farmers to carry out actions that can help with the long-term productivity and resilience of the soil to benefit food

production. These actions can also provide environmental benefits, such as increased biodiversity.

Countryside Stewardship (CS) provides financial incentives for farmers, foresters and land managers to look after and improve the environment. CS Mid-Tier is primarily focused on improving habitats and biodiversity; the mid-tier offer has now been merged with SFI for new entrants to schemes from 2024, but existing Mid-Tier agreements are not affected by this merge. CS Higher Tier supports farmers to deliver objectives including protection and enhancement of the natural environment, increase of biodiversity, and improvement of habitats.

Landscape Recovery supports farmers and land managers who want to take a large-scale, long-term approach to nurture wilder landscapes and wildlife-rich habitat. It supports objectives such as restoring ecological or hydrological function across a landscape, peatland restoration, woodland management, or habitat restoration.

### ■ **Agriculture: Subsidies**

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[5867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to commission an impact assessment of the agricultural transition plan.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The present Government will not be over-turning the applecart. We are fully committed to the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes set out in the previous Government's Agricultural Transition Plan. We will optimise these schemes in an orderly way to ensure they produce the right outcomes for farmers.

We plan to increase the transparency of these schemes by publishing data on the impact they are having. We will confirm next steps in the rollout of other ELM schemes, including how we will publish this data, in due course.

### ■ **Cats: Smuggling**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[5925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to prevent the illegal smuggling of cats into the UK.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government is committed to introducing the most ambitious programme for animal welfare in a generation. We are considering the most effective ways to deliver this and will be setting out next steps in due course.

### ■ **Coastal Erosion and Flood Control: Finance**

**Dame Caroline Dinéage:**

[\[6039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to announce a further tranche of flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) funding.

**Emma Hardy:**

Protecting communities around the country from flooding is one of the Department's five core priorities.

After 14 years of Conservative failure, flood defences have been left in critical condition leaving over 80,000 homes at risk of flooding.

To respond to these challenges, the new Labour Government has established a Flood Resilience Taskforce to turbocharge the delivery of flood defences, drainage systems, and natural flood management schemes.

We will be reviewing the programme with a view to ensuring flood risk management is fit for the challenges we face now and in the future. Decisions on future spending will be made at the Spending Review later this month.

**■ Drinking Water: Romford****Andrew Rosindell:****[5900]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he has taken to work with relevant bodies to (a) assess and (b) improve the quality of tap water in Romford constituency.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) has a statutory duty to monitor water companies' compliance with the regulations in place in England to protect drinking water quality, and to take enforcement action where necessary. To ensure we continue to maintain our world-leading water quality standards, water companies carry out regular risk assessments and sampling to make sure that drinking water supplies remain safe. This includes Essex and Suffolk Water who serve the Romford Constituency.

Work is continuing across Defra and the Drinking Water Inspectorate to consider potential updates to the drinking water regulations to safeguard current high drinking water standards and ensure the regulations remain fit for purpose. This includes working with a range of external experts to inform and develop Government's thinking on these matters.

**■ Fish Farming: Animal Welfare****James Naish:****[6716]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to protect the welfare of farmed fish at slaughter.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Legislation on the protection of animals at the time of killing requires that farmed fish are spared avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations.

In 2023 the Animal Welfare Committee's updated Opinion on the welfare of farmed fish at the time of killing was published. A GB-wide farmed trout joint Government and



industry working group is now examining the issues raised in the report to explore the potential options for more detailed welfare at killing requirements. The Scottish Government are also working closely with the salmon industry.

**Vikki Slade:**

[\[7335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to increase protection for farmed fish.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Animal Welfare Committee's updated Opinion on the welfare of farmed fish at the time of killing was published last year. A GB-wide farmed trout joint Government and industry working group is now examining the issues raised in the report to explore the potential options for more detailed welfare at killing requirements. The Scottish Government are also working closely with the salmon industry.

## ■ Fisheries: UK Relations with EU

**Caroline Voaden:**

[\[7136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what (a) economic, (b) social and (c) employment factors are taken into consideration in fisheries consultations between the UK and the EU.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

As an independent coastal State the UK engages in annual fisheries consultations with the EU to set fishing opportunities for shared stock. In doing so the UK seeks to balance the fisheries objectives as laid out in the Fisheries Act 2020 in accordance with the policies of the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS). In particular, in line with the JFS, the UK seeks to provide certainty and profitable outcomes for the industry.

## ■ Flood Control: Alverstoke

**Dame Caroline Dinenge:**

[\[6040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the Alverstoke Coastal Defence Scheme will receive Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management catch up funding.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Environment Agency has worked with Gosport Borough Council to agree a business case for the Alverstoke Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management scheme. This scheme aims to better protect 99 residential and 9 commercial properties from flooding. The project has received £1 million of Government funding to date with a further £0.2 million yet to be allocated. However, due to inflation in the construction industry and other factors, costs have risen. Currently, the project has a funding gap of £3.6 million.

The Environment Agency are working with the Government to reduce partnership funding gaps on schemes that have been impacted by rising costs.



## ■ Floods

**Sarah Gibson:**

[\[7147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to investigate the cause of floods in (a) Calne and (b) other areas that have not experienced flooding for decades.

**Emma Hardy:**

Over 300 properties flooded across 50 communities in Wiltshire alone during the winter of 2023/24, which was the wettest since records began 1871. These same areas of Wiltshire also experienced heavy rainfall in September 2024. The rural catchments that have seen numerous floods during this period are sensitive to both rainfall intensities and durations. It is understood that it has been a combination of both high intensity and prolonged durations during these storm events combined with saturated catchments resulting in localised flooding.

Wiltshire Council are in the process of undertaking Flood & Water Management Act 2010 Section 19 flood reports investigating the flooding issues experienced across the county last winter. We will input information and evidence into these reports.

We are working with flood risk management authorities, through a Wiltshire Rural Runoff project, to improve understanding of the causes of flooding, and it will look for potential for interventions to reduce the impacts of these types of flood events. The Calne catchments is in one of the five focus areas, and the evidence and understanding is being gathered this winter with support of the Wildlife Trusts and local landowners and farmers.

As these types of rainfall events are expected to become more frequent with climate change, The Environment Agency are exploring how they can make our flood warning service more effective for these types of rural catchment, that respond quickly to heavy intensity rain.

## ■ Forests: EU Law

**Robin Swann:**

[\[7309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to issue guidance for Northern Ireland importers on compliance with the EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Ministers are currently considering our approach to this in Northern Ireland, and the Government will communicate relevant arrangements at the earliest possible opportunity.

## ■ Greyhounds: Animal Welfare

**Laurence Turner:**

[\[7144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help improve the welfare of greyhound dogs.

**Laurence Turner:**

[\[7145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help protect the welfare of greyhound dogs within the greyhound racing industry.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The welfare of greyhounds in England is protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. The 2006 Act allows action to be taken where there is evidence of cruelty to an animal or a failure to provide for that animal's welfare needs. This includes where greyhounds are raced at greyhound racing tracks, kept at trainers' kennels, or kept elsewhere as pets, for example.

Further to these general provisions, specific welfare standards at all greyhound racing tracks in England are laid out in the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010. Requirements in the 2010 Regulations include having a veterinary surgeon in attendance while dogs are running (with all greyhounds inspected by the vet before being allowed to run); requiring all greyhounds to be microchipped and earmarked before they can race or trial; and requiring records to be kept by the track of all dogs run or trialed at the track and any dogs injured.

Standards in the 2010 Regulations are enforced by either the track's local authority or the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB). The role of the GBGB as a regulator of these standards is independently scrutinised by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS).

In addition to its role as an industry regulator, GBGB has also undertaken a number of welfare reforms, including publishing a long term, national welfare strategy in May 2022— 'A Good Life for Every Greyhound'. The strategy focuses not only on reducing risks of injury but also developing and implementing new management practices to improve the welfare of greyhounds throughout their lives, including after they have finished racing. The Government is monitoring GBGB's progress in delivering the strategy and should further measures and protections be required the Government will, of course, consider options which are targeted, effective, and proportionate.

## ■ Horse Riding: Safety

**Laura Kyrke-Smith:**

[\[7351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of commissioning a review of horse rider safety standards; and whether he plans to legislate to strengthen those standards for solo riders.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Anyone in the business of hiring out horses is required to have a licence under the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (LAIA) Regulations 2018.

It is a condition, under schedule 5 of the 2018 regulations, that all equipment provided to riders is in good and safe condition. Such activities are licenced by local authorities.

The statutory guidance for hiring out horses provides more details on safety standards, for example the requirement for assessments to be carried out for new riders.

#### ■ **Lead: Contamination**

**Sir Julian Smith:**

[\[6203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the (a) Food Standards Agency and (b) Committee on Toxicity on the potential risks of lead contamination in the UK food chain.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra officials and Ministers have regular meetings with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) where a range of issues are discussed and I last met with Professor Susan Jebb on 5 September. Ministers have had no specific discussions on this with the Committee on Toxicity or the FSA.

#### ■ **Sustainable Farming Incentive: Cider**

**Mark Garnier:**

[\[6185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the incentives in the Sustainable Farming Incentive for cider apple orchards.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The expanded Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) offer published in May 2024 includes capital grants to plant cider apple trees as part of an Agro-forestry system, and ongoing payments for actions which could be used in or around cider orchards such as flower rich grass margins blocks or strips, Integrated Pest Management plans, or managing hedgerows. Looking ahead, we will optimise Environmental Land Management schemes including SFI in an orderly way, over time, ensuring they produce the right outcomes for all farmers, for food security and for nature's recovery in a just and equitable way.

#### ■ **Textiles: Waste Disposal**

**Jess Asato:**

[\[6936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he plans to take to reduce the amount of post-consumer textiles discarded annually.

**Jess Asato:**

[\[6938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has targets for the (a) recycling and (b) reuse of textiles.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Secretary of State has asked his department to convene a taskforce of experts from across Government, industry, academia and relevant non-governmental organisations. The Taskforce will help to develop a Circular Economy Strategy for England and a series of roadmaps detailing the interventions that the Government will make on a sector-by-sector basis. The Taskforce will consider the evidence for action right across the economy, and as such the Taskforce will evaluate what interventions may need to be made in the textiles sector as it helps to develop the Circular Economy Strategy.

In the meantime, we continue to fund action in this area through the Textiles 2030 voluntary initiative which supports businesses and organisations within the fashion and textiles industry to transition to more sustainable and circular practices.

**■ Trapping****Liz Jarvis:**[\[6688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to implement a total ban on snares.

**Mary Creagh:**

This is a devolved matter and the information provided therefore relates to England only.

The Government will introduce the most ambitious programme for animal welfare in a generation. As outlined in our manifesto, we will bring an end to the use of snare traps. We are considering the most effective way to deliver this commitment and will be setting out next steps in due course.

**FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE****■ Armed Conflict: Children's Rights****James Cartlidge:**[\[6336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help protect the rights of children in areas of conflict.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK is committed to preventing and ending grave violations against children in conflict. We support affected children through our humanitarian funding and support to education in conflict and crisis. We also regularly raise the impact of armed conflict on children with other governments. The UK is an active member of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), ensuring effective scrutiny of conflicts where children are harmed and holding perpetrators to account.

## ■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**

**Jeremy Corbyn:**

[\[5842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he expects negotiations with Mauritius on the (a) sovereignty of the Chagos Islands and (b) return of Chagossians who wish to resettle will conclude.

**Stephen Doughty:**

On 3 October the UK and Mauritius reached a political agreement on the sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) / Chagos Archipelago. This agreement secures the effective operation of the vital UK-US military base on Diego Garcia well into the next century. Following Mauritian elections, the Government will seek Treaty signature and ratification when Parliamentary time allows. Under this agreement Mauritius will be free to implement a programme of resettlement on the islands, other than Diego Garcia. The terms of resettlement will be for Mauritius to determine. Mauritius and the UK will also now work to start a new programme of visits to the Chagos Archipelago for Chagossians.

## ■ **China: Russia**

**Alicia Kearns:**

[\[6570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with the Chinese ambassador to the UK on reports that a Russian state owned company has developed a weapons programme in China for military drones.

**Catherine West:**

In my meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 26 July 2024, I urged China to prevent its companies supporting Russia's military industrial complex. Such support poses a material threat to international security and prosperity. Officials have also raised this with the Chinese Ambassador. We will continue to make our concerns clear at every opportunity.

The reports the Right Honorable Member references add to a growing body of open-source reports that Chinese companies are enabling Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, including through the provision of dual use goods. The supply of military UAVs would be a direct contradiction to statements from China that it would not provide weapons to relevant parties of the conflict.

## ■ **Israel: Arms Trade**

**Melanie Ward:**

[\[7152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the possibility of arms supplied from the UK to Israel being used to be used to (a) commit and (b) facilitate serious violations of International humanitarian law in (i) the West Bank and (ii) Lebanon.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK's robust export licensing criteria state that the Government will not issue export licences if there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of International Humanitarian Law. Following the Government's decision on 2 September to suspend certain arms export licences to Israel for use in Gaza, there are currently no extant licences that we assess are for use in Lebanon or the West Bank, apart from the licences for the F-35 components which were exempted. We are clear that International Humanitarian Law must be upheld, and civilians protected.

■ **Israel: F-35 Aircraft****Chris Law:**[\[5587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential risk of UK-made parts for the F-35 fighter aircraft that are re-exported to Israel being used in violations of international law.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

As set out in the Foreign Secretary's statement to Parliament on 2 September 2024, following consideration of the detailed International Humanitarian Law (IHL) assessment, he concluded, and the Secretary of State for Business and Trade agreed, that there is a clear risk that military exports to Israel, where used for military operations in Gaza, might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL. That assessment includes components exported to the global F-35 programme that will ultimately be used in Israeli F-35s. In accordance with the Strategic Export Licencing Criteria (SELC), licences for items we assess might be used to carry out or facilitate Israeli military operations in the Gaza conflict have therefore been suspended.

However, as set out in the Secretary of State for Business and Trade's statement, it is not currently possible to suspend licensing of F35 components for use by Israel without prejudicing the entire global F35 programme, including its broader strategic role in NATO and our support to Ukraine. Therefore, as announced to Parliament in that statement, the Foreign Secretary advised and the Secretary of State for Business and Trade agreed, that to ensure international peace and security it was necessary to take the specific measure of excluding exports to the F-35 program from the scope of the suspension, but this exclusion should not in principle apply to licences for F-35 components which could be identified as going to Israel. Departing from the Strategic Export Licencing Criteria to exclude F-35 licences from the scope of the suspension decision is consistent with HMG's published policy, which states that the application of the SELC is "*without prejudice to the application to specific cases of specific measures as may be announced to Parliament from time to time.*"

## ■ Pakistan: Religious Freedom

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[5316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to support community initiatives to (a) promote religious tolerance and (b) protect cultural and religious heritage in Pakistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is committed to Freedom of Religion or Belief for all. In an introductory phone call with the Human Rights Minister for Pakistan on 4 September, I raised the importance of promoting religious tolerance and harmony.

Our programme work in Pakistan focuses on bringing together community leaders and minority representatives to promote tolerance and reduce violence. We also run a hate speech and disinformation programme which works to protect marginalised communities from hate speech online.

## ■ Turkey: Press Freedom

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[\[6755\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his counterpart in Turkey on the freedom of journalists in (a) Turkey and (b) Turkish Kurdistan.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Media freedom is a priority for the FCDO. The UK believes that freedom of expression is a fundamental right and we regularly engage the Turkish government on urging respect for freedom of media, which is essential to the long-term health of Turkish democracy. Further high-level engagement is planned in coming months.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Health Services and Social Services: Homelessness

**Paula Barker:**

[\[6612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve intermediate care for the homeless.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

People experiencing homelessness are one of the most complex cohorts for hospital discharge and intermediate care services. The Government is working closely with NHS England and local authorities to drive improvements in intermediate care across the country, to help keep people well and independent for as long as possible, provide alternatives to hospital and care home admissions, and support timely and effective discharge for those admitted to hospital.



**Health: Information**

**Marsha De Cordova:** [\[5648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that all NHS information systems can print information in accessible formats.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Under the Accessible Information Standard, services should verify that where a patient needs to access information on a website, it is accessible to them. If not, services should make the information available in another way, for instance as a paper copy, via email, or as audio. Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, National Health Service providers must have regard to information standards.

**Lead: Contamination**

**Sir Julian Smith:** [\[6204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to maintain international standards on lead thresholds for foodstuffs.

**Sir Julian Smith:** [\[6208\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason has the Food Standards Agency not set an established threshold for lead content in eggs.

**Sir Julian Smith:** [\[6210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what guidance his Department issues to local authorities on conducting lead level tests on food products sold in local shops within areas known to have high levels of environmental lead contamination.

**Sir Julian Smith:** [\[6212\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of food chain information sheets for allowing farmers rearing animals on land with high lead levels to (a) accurately declare this information and (b) dispose of appropriate offal.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Lead is a naturally occurring contaminant in the environment. Independent scientific expert groups advise that exposure to lead should be reduced as much as possible. Maximum levels are set on the 'as low as reasonably achievable' basis. Levels focus on foods that are significant contributors to our intake, and eggs are not significant contributors so there are no maximum levels in place. Where maximum levels are not set, enforcement action for commercially produced foods can be taken if there is a food safety concern. Consideration of setting maximum levels will also take into account levels set by international bodies such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) keeps contaminants, including lead in food, under review. Lead in the diet has been reviewed several times by the United Kingdom's independent Scientific Advisory Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food,



Consumer Products and the Environment (COT), including lead in the diet of infants and young children, and an ongoing review on the potential effects of lead on the maternal diet. Previous reviews have shown that while lead exposures are not of health concern for the majority of the population, a small risk to some individuals arising from exposure to high levels of lead in soil, dust, or in drinking water cannot be excluded.

The FSA is planning to review dietary lead as part of its rolling programme of risk analysis of environmental contaminants in food. This will include consideration of hot spots where exposure is likely to be higher. Advice will be provided to ministers who will make the decision on any changes to maximum levels. The FSA has worked with farming groups and industry on advice to farmers on preventing lead contamination of livestock, which includes practical suggestions for areas of the country with high levels of lead in the soil.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency undertakes investigations on farms for the FSA, where we are notified that farm food-producing animals may have been exposed to chemicals which could impact food safety. Advice is provided to the farmer as well as a reminder of their responsibilities to protect the food chain and comply with maximum levels.

Food Chain Information (FCI) requires farmers to indicate the health status of their farm, that withdrawal periods of veterinary medicines have been complied with, as well as other information related to public health. Where relevant this may include information on where elevated levels of lead have been found. As a precautionary measure, some abattoir operators voluntarily dispose of certain offal, such as liver, from old animals, as these are likely to accumulate more residues. Food Business Operators (FBOs) and Official Vets (OVs) review the FCI before any animal is slaughtered. Where there are concerns with the information provided, action is taken by the FBO and monitored by the OV, based on the information provided in the FCI.

The FSA uses evidence from national and international agencies, local enforcement authorities, the food manufacturing industry, food retailers, and the public, to help us respond rapidly to any problems in our food supply. Incident notification systems help us to alert consumers if food becomes contaminated. Lead is included in the national monitoring plan for products of animal origin and if non-compliance is found, appropriate action will be taken by local authorities. In addition, food businesses and local authorities complete risk-based checks to ensure the food we buy is safe.

## ■ NHS Learning Support Fund

**Mary Glendon:**

[\[6228\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the NHS Learning Support Fund.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government keeps the funding arrangements for all healthcare students under close review. At all times the Government must strike a balance between the level of

support students receive, and the need to make best use of public funds to deliver value for money. There are no immediate plans to make changes to the levels of funding provided by the scheme.

## ■ Nurses: Training

**Mary Glendon:**

[\[6229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 2899 on Nurses: Training, what steps he is taking to promote the merits of nursing as a career.

**Karin Smyth:**

To remove the barriers to training in clinical roles, eligible students receive a non-repayable grant of £5,000 a year, with additional incentives for priority specialisms, such as mental health nursing.

The National Health Service has a long-established campaign process for promoting NHS careers, including nursing, both locally and nationally. NHS Health Careers, as part of NHS England, provides support to people in education and at different stages of their career, to learn more about all the career opportunities available in the NHS.

NHS England is expanding routes into healthcare professions through apprenticeships and blended learning programmes, allowing students to choose to study in a flexible way that reflects their needs.

To ensure nursing remains an attractive career, the Government will also make sure that staff are treated with the respect they deserve, improve their working conditions, and reform the way they deliver care.

## ■ Prostate Cancer: Screening

**David Davis:**

[\[5870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the National Screening Committee will next review the potential merits of screening for prostate cancer.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK National Screening Committee's (UK NSC) evidence review for prostate cancer screening is already underway, and plans to report within the UK NSC's three-year work plan.

The evidence review includes modelling the clinical cost effectiveness of several approaches to prostate cancer screening, including different potential ways of screening the whole population from 40 years of age onwards and targeted screening aimed at groups of people identified as being at higher than average risk, such as black men or men with a family history of cancer.

## ■ Royal Berkshire Hospital

**Clive Jones:**

**[7080]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle the redevelopment of the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

**Karin Smyth:**

We are reviewing the New Hospital Programme (NHP) in order to put it on a sustainable footing, which will include a realistic timetable for delivery and clarity on the funding required. As set out in the Terms of Reference for the review, the new hospital scheme for the Royal Berkshire Hospital is in the scope of the review. The review will feed into the spending review process, where decisions will be taken in the round, and the Government will confirm the outcome as part of that process. Further information on the Terms of Reference is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-hospital-programme-review-terms-of-reference>

While the review is taking place, we are continuing to support all schemes within the NHP. Up to the end of the 2023/24, the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust has been provided with over £20 million in funding to progress their new hospital scheme.

## HOME OFFICE

### ■ Action Fraud

**Dr Luke Evans:**

**[5384]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will undertake a review of levels of public awareness of the roles and responsibilities of Action Fraud in investigating fraud-related crimes.

**Dan Jarvis:**

We are working with City of London Police to replace Action Fraud with a new and improved national police reporting service for fraud and cyber crime. The new service will use the latest technology to improve reporting tools and support services for victims, providing far greater intelligence to policing for investigations, and allowing for greater prevention and disruption at scale.

In the meantime, Action Fraud have developed a calendar of campaign activity underpinned by data and insight, to encourage reporting to the service, increase public confidence and impact behaviour.

Action Fraud and Cyber Protect also deliver national campaigns and helped to amplify national campaign activity from a host of partners, including the National Crime Agency (NCA), the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), the NCA's National Economic Crime Centre, and Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

## ■ Gender Based Violence

**Gareth Bacon:** [\[5122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what methodology she will use to assess progress in halving violence against women and girls within 10 years.

**Gareth Bacon:** [\[5123\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (a) how and (b) with what frequency does her Department plan to report progress in delivering its target of halving violence against women and girls within 10 years.

**Jess Phillips:**

This Government will treat tackling violence against women and girls as a national emergency and will ensure that every tool is used to target perpetrators and address the root causes of violence and misogyny.

In measuring the level of VAWG we are taking a whole of government approach, building on prevalence measures in the CSTW and working across sectors on the design of metrics to sit behind the government: safer streets mission.

More information will be set out in due course.

## ■ Immigration

**Neil Coyle:** [\[5585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans her Department has to review exceptional circumstances criteria.

**Seema Malhotra:**

Where an applicant is not able to meet all the core eligibility requirements in the family Rules under Appendix FM of the Immigration Rules, including the financial requirement, the application will receive consideration of whether there are exceptional circumstances which would render refusal a breach of Article 8 (the right to respect for private and family life) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This involves considering whether refusal would result in unjustifiably harsh consequences for the applicant or their family.

The exceptional circumstances test is long established in case law and has been approved by the Supreme Court as upholding our obligations under Article 8 of the ECHR. The government keeps all policies under review.

For further information on how the test is considered, information can be found at pp.59-71 of the following guidance: Family life (as a partner or parent) and exceptional circumstances ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)).

For specific information on exceptional circumstances in the context of recourse to public funds, guidance can be found at pp.10-11 of the following guidance: Permitting access to public funds ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)).

## ■ Violence Reduction Units: Finance

**Helen Hayes:**

[\[6329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what her Department's planned timetable is for announcing future funding settlements for (a) Violence Reduction Units and (v) the London Violence Reduction Unit.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

We recognise the valuable work and significant progress that Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), including the London Violence Reduction Unit, have made in understanding and preventing serious violence.

All decisions on funding post March 2025 will be subject to the spending review.

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### ■ Anti-social Behaviour

**Charlie Dewhirst:**

[\[5737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Pursuant to the answer of 5 September 2024, to Question 2635, on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Expenditure, what interventions she plans to introduce to reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour.

**Alex Norris:**

Tackling anti-social behaviour is a top priority for this Government, and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission. We understand that anti-social behaviour causes great harm and misery to our communities, and, if left unchecked, can lead to more serious offending.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is working closely with the Home Office and the Safer Streets Mission to tackle anti-social behaviour in all communities.

We will put thousands of neighbourhood police and community support officers back into local communities, so that residents have somewhere to turn to when things go wrong.

We will crack down on the adults making neighbourhoods feel unsafe and unwelcoming by introducing new powers, such as Respect Orders with tough sanctions and penalties, to tackle repeat offending.

The Deputy Prime Minister is also overseeing cross-Government work to consider how we support our communities and address issues of cohesion in the longer term.

## ■ Building Regulations

**David Simmonds:** [\[5681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she is taking steps to raise awareness of the new building regulations coming into effect from October 2024.

**Rushanara Ali:**

[Legislation](#) was laid in Parliament in May 2024 to update the Building Regulations 2010 by setting out toilet requirements in new non-domestic buildings in England. Statutory guidance supporting these changes was also published ([Approved Document T](#)). These changes came into force on 1 October 2024.

At the time legislation was laid, circular letters were sent on behalf of the Secretary of State informing local authorities, heads of building control and approved inspectors of the upcoming changes to the Building Regulations. These can found on [GOV.UK](#). A formal response to the consultation was also published on [GOV.UK](#) alongside impact assessments.

## ■ Council Tax

**Edward Morello:** [\[5731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the impact of basing the council tax that a household pays on the value of their property relative to others on 1 April 1991 on rural areas.

**Jim McMahon:**

All properties in England are assigned one of eight council tax bands based on their capital value in April 1991. Valuing all properties based on the same date ensures that all dwellings are valued on a fair and consistent basis, but the Government does monitor council tax levels for different councils and across regions. The Government will continue to keep all tax policy under review.

## ■ Council Tax: Probate

**David Simmonds:** [\[5676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many dwellings claim the council tax exemption for probate in each local billing authority in the most recent period for which figures are available; and what the estimated cost is of the exemption each year.

**Jim McMahon:**

As of the most recent available data for September 2023, there were 135,698 dwellings exempt from council tax due to the dwelling being empty following the passing of the occupant (exemption class F). The Government does not collect data on the council tax foregone in providing this exemption.

## ■ Council Tax: Single People

**David Simmonds:**

[\[5423\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the value of the council tax single person discount on a Band D home is in each local billing authority in England in 2024-25; how many households claim that discount in each local billing authority in the most recent period for which figures are available; and what estimate she has made of the annual aggregate cost of the discount.

**Jim McMahon:**

The annual aggregate cost of the single person discount is dependent on decisions taken by individual local authorities who set their council tax level having taken account of their tax base. Data on the number of households receiving the single person discount is collected by the Department as part of the annual Council Taxbase snapshot. The 2023 snapshot can be found at the following [link](#).

## ■ Devolution: Cornwall and Devon

**Martin Wrigley:**

[\[5503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Devon and Torbay devolution deal to include (a) Plymouth and (b) Cornwall.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Government has emphasised its commitment to transferring power out of Westminster and into local communities, handing power to those with local knowledge and who are incentivised to drive progress forward. The devolution agreement for Devon and Torbay represents an important first step for this area to see initial benefits from devolution in the short term as part of our drive to shift power away from Westminster.

These benefits include funding to drive place-based economic regeneration, increased local control over transport functions and devolution of the adult education budget. We encourage the authorities to continue working together and with their neighbours to explore the next steps towards deeper and wider devolution for their area, and stand ready to work with the area and consider any proposals they want to put forward.

## ■ Devolution: Local Government

**John Glen:**

[\[5299\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the planned (a) remit of and (b) budget for the Council of Nations and Regions is; and which regions have been invited to participate in the council.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Council of the Nations and Regions will bring together the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, the First and deputy First Minister of Northern

Ireland, and the Mayors of Combined Authorities to renew opportunities to collaborate with each other. On 16 July 2024 the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to all areas that do not have a devolution deal to invite them to come forward with a proposal. New Mayors established through this process would also be eligible to sit on the Council of the Nations and Regions. Further details on the Council will be published in due course.

## ■ Electoral Register

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch:**

[\[5627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of an automatic electoral registration on the number of Parliamentary seats in each constituent nation of the United Kingdom.

**Alex Norris:**

The Government is actively exploring ways to improve voter registration, as per its manifesto commitment. The fact that an estimated eight million eligible electors are missing from the register, or incorrectly registered, is totally unacceptable. The Government intends to tackle this, and appropriate assessments will be made as policy develops.

## ■ Housing

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[\[6753\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to (a) ensure there is sufficient housing supply to meet demand and (b) reduce the number of families living in (i) overcrowded and (ii) unsuitable accommodation.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

This Government is committed to delivering 1.5 million homes over this Parliament, to ensure everyone has access to housing.

We are taking bold action to reform our planning system, delivering affordable homes, a new generation of New Towns, unblock stalled housing sites and reform the housing market.

The Renters' Right Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will apply a Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector for the first time. We will launch a consultation on a new Decent Homes Standard across both the Private and Social Rented Sectors in due course to ensure everyone has a decent, warm and safe place to call home.



## ■ Housing: Construction

**Manuela Perteghella:**

[\[3400\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help ensure that new housing is (a) of high quality, (b) highly energy efficient and (c) built to zero carbon standards.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the Hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [4956](#) on 17 September 2024.

**David Simmonds:**

[\[5417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information (a) her Department and (b) the Planning Inspectorate holds on which local authorities have (i) slowed and (ii) stopped house building due to nutrient neutrality requirements.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

At present, advice on the need to achieve nutrient neutrality applies to areas of land within approximately sixty local planning authorities. However, the provision of such advice does not mean that housebuilding in these areas is necessarily being stopped or slowed down as it depends whether the nutrient impact of development can be mitigated.

While there is a developing pipeline of mitigation available, including schemes supported by government funding, we are exploring solutions to support the building of homes affected by nutrient neutrality without weakening environmental protections.

## ■ Housing: Disability

**Laura Kyrke-Smith:**

[\[7354\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the number and proportion of disability-accessible housing in Aylesbury constituency; and what steps she is taking to increase the proportion of such housing in that constituency.

**Rushanara Ali:**

The data requested is not held centrally although the [English Housing Survey](#) does collect data on accessibility and adaptations within the home. Housing is one of this Government's top priorities, everyone deserves to live in a decent home, in which they feel safe. We will set out our policies on accessible new build housing shortly.

## ■ Local Government: Elections

**David Simmonds:**

[\[5414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether it remains her Department's policy that the mayoral elections for (a) Hull & East Yorkshire

and (b) Greater Lincolnshire Mayoral Combined Authorities will take place in May 2025; and when she plans to bring forward secondary legislation in relation to these elections.

**Jim McMahon:**

On 19 September we announced that the government would proceed with the devolution agreements for Hull and East Yorkshire and Greater Lincolnshire. Legislation to implement these agreements will be laid before the House as Parliamentary time allows.

■ **Local Government: Working Hours**

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch:**

[\[5626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of a four day week for full pay in local government on the provision of services.

**Jim McMahon:**

Local authorities are independent employers, responsible for the management and organisation of their own workforces. Any policy announcements will be made in the usual way.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Remote Working**

**David Simmonds:**

[\[5413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 3260 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Remote Working, if she will list (a) the individual offices which cannot accommodate a 60% level of attendance and (b) the proportion of time that staff assigned to each of those offices are expected to attend work in the office.

**Alex Norris:**

MHCLG offices in Hemel Hempstead, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield, and Wolverhampton do not currently have enough space for people to meet 60% attendance. Instead, people in these offices are expected to attend for 40% of their working time over a 3-month period.

■ **National Security**

**David Simmonds:**

[\[5674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 3408 on National Security, what her Department's timetable is for developing proposals on (a) strengthening democracy and (b) upholding the integrity of elections.

**Alex Norris:**

As set out in our manifesto, the Government is committed to strengthening our democracy, upholding the integrity of elections and widening participation in the democratic process.

My department is currently working with key stakeholders to develop proposals which give effect to this commitment and will introduce legislative measures when parliamentary time allows.

#### ■ **Public Libraries: Lincolnshire**

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[5266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much funding his Department has provided for library resources in Lincolnshire County Council in each of the last five years.

**Jim McMahon:**

Funding for local councils is provided through the Local Government Finance Settlement. The majority of Settlement funding is unringfenced for local authorities to use as they wish, including funding local libraries.

We recognise that councils know their communities best, and with greater stability they will be in a better position to enhance local services and facilities such as libraries. We understand that improving how local government is funded is crucial to enabling councils to deliver for local residents and ensuring we can deliver our missions.

For 2024/25, the Local Government Finance Settlement was £64.7 billion. For Lincolnshire County Council, this makes available up to £699.1 million.

#### ■ **Tower Hamlets Council**

**David Simmonds:**

[\[5692\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the status is of the best value intervention in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets; and what discussions she has had with local hon. Members on that intervention since 4 July 2024.

**Jim McMahon:**

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to Question UIN [3610](#) on 9 September 2024. The Secretary of State has received the independent Best Value inspection team's report, this is being considered carefully and any next steps will be set out in due course. The Report will be sent to local hon. Members together with the government's response at the appropriate time.

#### ■ **Veterans: Homelessness**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[6841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to (a) introduce, (b) manage and (c) monitor the effectiveness of the Homes for Heroes scheme.

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[6842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the projected cost to the public purse will be of (a) introducing and (b) managing the Homes for Heroes scheme in (i) 2024-25 and (ii) 2025-26; and from which Department budget will it be funded.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

On 24 September, the Prime Minister announced an ambition to house all veterans in housing need.

As a result, the Department will bring forward changes to social housing allocations regulations to exempt all veterans, along with young care leavers and victims of domestic abuse, from local connection and residency tests to improve their access to social rented housing.

We have also written to local authorities to explain these changes in more detail, and to remind them of existing guidance on improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces and victims of domestic abuse.

■ **Women: Sleeping Rough****Paula Barker:**[\[900451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with the Minister for Women and Equalities on reducing the number of women sleeping rough.

**Rushanara Ali:**

We recognise that women sleeping on the streets have different experiences and needs to men, particularly relating to experiences of violence and abuse.

£9.2 million funding is available for women-specific rough sleeping services. We will take action to tackle rising levels of rough sleeping and develop a strategy to get us back on track to ending homelessness.

**JUSTICE**■ **Acquittals: Compensation****Ben Lake:**[\[6421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of using alternative methods of determining eligibility for compensation in the event of an acquittal following a re-trial.

**Heidi Alexander:**

The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the statutory Miscarriages of Justice Application Service (MOJAS). Individuals who have had their convictions quashed in an out of time appeal are eligible to apply for compensation, including those who have subsequently been acquitted of all offences at a retrial. The Law Commission is

currently undertaking a review of the criminal appeals process which includes MOJAS. I will be considering their findings once their review is complete.

## ■ **HM Courts and Tribunals Service: Management**

**Andy Slaughter:**

[\[5948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what her Department's timescale is for ensuring that reforms to operational systems resulting from HMCTS's transformation programme capture more detailed management information; and whether her Department plans to publish that detailed management information.

**Heidi Alexander:**

As the Reform Programme concludes in March 2025 and new systems are implemented and embedded, they will - in most instances - ensure more detailed data is captured.

Not only are reformed services making a difference directly to those who use them, they're now giving us quality insights we need for the first time, to support evidence-based decisions around further improving service. For example, Reform has made it possible to collect a much wider range of data on our users including their protected characteristics, which means we can better understand how to improve access to justice.

This ability will be an ongoing feature of our work in future and help us inform improvements in the wider system.

As new data becomes available it will be considered for publication as management information or accredited official statistics to meet user needs in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics

## ■ **Prisoners' Release: Domestic Abuse**

**Paula Barker:**

[\[6608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to prevent women being put in danger following the release of perpetrators of domestic violence.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

We have important safeguards in place for the early release scheme 'SDS40' and have made sure that changes won't apply to a series of offences that occur most frequently in the context of domestic abuse including stalking, coercive or controlling behaviour, and non-fatal strangulation.

Victims and survivors can be assured that probation follow business as usual processes to build appropriate risk management plans to support the safe release of prisoners. Victims and survivors who are eligible for and have opted into the Victim Contact Scheme or the Victim Notification Scheme continue to get information and updates about developments on their case.

All offenders released are subject to robust licence conditions and risk management plans, monitored by the probation service. There are clear expectations in place for

probation staff managing cases where there is evidence of domestic abuse. While on licence, offenders will be subject to conditions including those deemed necessary to protect the victim and wider public, such as exclusion zones, location monitoring, residence at a specified place or disclosing details of any new relationship. Offenders must comply with these conditions and attend supervision. If they fail to comply, they can be recalled to continue serving their sentence in prison.

## ■ Probation: Wales

**Liz Saville Roberts:**

[\[6347\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment she has made of the impact of the Early Release Scheme on probation services in Wales since 10 September 2024.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Probation teams play a crucial role across Wales. The impact of further changes was carefully considered, and concrete action has been taken to mitigate pressures including the recruitment of additional probation officers.

## ■ Prosecutions: Cornwall and Devon

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[7193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to reduce the charge to finalisation rate in Devon and Cornwall.

**Heidi Alexander:**

We are committed to delivering swift access to justice and reducing the outstanding caseload in the criminal courts. Whilst the Ministry of Justice and HMCTS have oversight of the timeliness with which cases move through the magistrates' and Crown Courts, the decision on when and where a case is listed is the responsibility of the independent judiciary.

As part of our efforts to improve timeliness for victims and witnesses, we are funding 106,500 days at the Crown Court this financial year (24/25) – more than in 6 out of the last 7 years. During 23/24, the Crown Courts across Devon and Cornwall sat a record number of days.

The Devon and Cornwall Criminal Justice Board brings together agencies from across the criminal justice system to monitor charge to completion timeliness which is published in the Criminal Justice System Delivery Data Dashboard. The average time for charge to case completion in the Crown Courts in Devon and Cornwall was 198 days for the fourth quarter of 2023-24 (the most recent published data), which was down 39 days on the first quarter of that year. This is 104 days shorter than the national average of 302 days.

## ■ Sexual Offences

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[5646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 5 September 2024 to Question 3767 on Sexual Offences, what (a) legislation and (b) offence the (i) 10701, (ii) 10702, (iii) 10703, (iv) 10704, (v) 02401, (vi) 07201, (vii) 07202 and (viii) 16501 code relates to.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The attached table provides the detail as requested.

**Attachments:**

1. Table [2024-10-09 PQ 5646 table.xlsx]

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[5647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 5 September 2024 to Question 3767 on Sexual Offences, whether HO code 03608 relates solely to the offence of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Ministry of Justice holds data on legislation and associated offences.

The attached table provides further detail for HO code 03608 outlining the offence description.

**Attachments:**

1. Table [2024-10-09 PQ 5647 table.xlsx]

## ■ Tribunals

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[\[6774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reimbursing the legal fees of claimants whose tribunal proceedings have been adjourned as a result of an unavailability of court resources.

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[\[6776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will review the effectiveness of the mechanisms in place to ensure parties in tribunal cases comply with information requests in a timely manner.

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[\[6777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of measures to prevent parties from adjourning tribunal hearings without valid cause.

**Heidi Alexander:**

The management and listing of tribunal cases, and decisions on whether to reimburse the legal fees of a party in individual cases, are functions of the independent judiciary.

Although orders for costs are not generally made in tribunal proceedings, tribunal procedure rules do provide for the tribunal to award costs in certain circumstances, for example where a party, or their legal representative, has conducted the litigation unreasonably.

HMCTS works closely with the judiciary to actively manage the progression of cases through the tribunal system. Legal officers regularly review the live caseload to ensure that tribunal cases are progressed in accordance with the directions of the tribunal so that they are ready to be heard when listed.

HMCTS continues to invest in improving tribunal productivity through the recruitment of additional Judges, deployment of Legal Officers to actively manage cases, the development of modern case management systems and the use of remote hearing technology.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### ■ Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023

**Alex Burghart:**

**[6419]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he plans to appeal against the judgment of the Belfast Court of Appeal in the challenge to the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023, delivered on 20 September 2024.

**Hilary Benn:**

On 7 October 2024, I laid a Written Ministerial Statement in Parliament providing the Government's initial response to the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal's judgment in *Dillon & Others*.

The statement can be found here: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-10-07/hcws108>.

This is a complex and wide-ranging judgment with significant implications. The Government is therefore carefully considering its findings to inform a decision on the way forward.

### ■ Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner

**Robin Swann:**

**[5748]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is responsible for discharging the (a) responsibilities and (b) functions of the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner while that post is vacant.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Government is committed to continuing to support veterans in Northern Ireland, including through the Veterans Welfare Service Northern Ireland and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.



The Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's Office will continue to support veterans across Northern Ireland by acting as a crucial link between veterans and the various support services available to them, including while a new Veterans Commissioner is appointed. We will set out steps for the appointment of a new Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner in due course.

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### ■ Digital Technology: Disadvantaged

**Saqib Bhatti:** [\[6586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will take steps to develop a digital inclusion strategy.

**Saqib Bhatti:** [\[6587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will ensure that funding is allocated for the creation of a new digital inclusion strategy.

**Saqib Bhatti:** [\[6588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to support the digital inclusion of (a) elderly, (b) economically disadvantaged and (c) disabled people.

**Saqib Bhatti:** [\[6590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to increase digital accessibility for vulnerable people.

**Chris Bryant:**

It is a scandal that the previous government did not introduce a digital inclusion strategy for ten years.

Digital inclusion is a priority for my department and for government, and work is ongoing to develop our approach to tackling digital exclusion and coordinate across government departments. Digital inclusion means ensuring that everyone has the access, skills, support and confidence to participate in a modern digital society, whatever their circumstances.

Government will work closely with the third sector, devolved administrations, businesses and local authorities, many of whom have already implemented highly successful programmes, to ensure interventions are collaborative and targeted to individual needs.

**Saqib Bhatti:** [\[6589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the potential contribution of a digital inclusion strategy to (a) stopping the spread of misinformation and (b) increasing public trust in social media.

**Chris Bryant:**

Digital inclusion is a key priority for the government and it is shocking that the previous government's out-of-date digital inclusion strategy was published a full decade ago, despite clear evidence that digital exclusion limits economic growth and harms individuals' chances to study, work and participate fully in society and the modern economy.

Alongside the duties the Online Safety Act places on social media platforms to minimise harmful content, including illegal disinformation, we need to enhance media literacy, so that users are more resilient online. Part of having the requisite skills to navigate the online world safely is the ability to engage critically with misleading content.

**TRANSPORT**■ **Airlines: Disability****Robin Swann:**[\[7310\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress the Civil Aviation Authority have made on the Performance Framework for Airline Accessibility; and whether she plans to introduce enforcement powers to ensure compliance with the proposed regulations.

**Mike Kane:**

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) published its new Airline Accessibility Performance Framework Guidance on 7 August 2024. It sets out requirements for airlines to meet existing legal obligations, and the criteria to be used by the CAA for airline accessibility assessments.

Everyone must be able to fly with dignity and ease. This Government is committed to ensuring aviation is accessible, and will consider the ways this can be best achieved.

■ **Arlesey Station and Hitchin Station: Access****Alistair Strathern:**[\[6671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans her Department has to improve accessibility at (a) Arlesey station and (b) Hitchin station.

**Simon Lightwood:**

We are carefully considering the best approach to the Access for All programme. This Government is committed to improving the accessibility of the railway and recognises the social and economic benefits this brings to communities.

## ■ Bus Services

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[5380\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that Transport Authorities work collectively to enhance cross-boundary bus routes.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government is determined to deliver better bus services, grow passenger numbers and drive opportunity to under-served regions. The government has set out a plan to achieve this, based on giving local leaders the tools they need to ensure bus services reflect the needs of the communities they serve, including considering how cross-boundary bus routes can improve the experience for bus passengers. As announced in the King's Speech, the government will introduce a Buses Bill to put the power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders right across England. We also plan to empower local transport authorities through reforming bus funding. By giving local leaders more control and flexibility over bus funding they can plan ahead to deliver their local transport priorities. The Department will work closely with local leaders and bus operators to deliver on these ambitions.

## ■ Bus Services: Fares

**Dr Luke Evans:**

[\[5381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make an assessment of the impact of the £2 bus fare cap on increasing bus usage in (a) the East Midlands and (b) Leicestershire.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The £2 fare cap was launched by the Department for Transport (DfT) on 1 January 2023 and is set to remain in place until the end of December 2024.

The DfT published an interim report in September 2023 setting out emerging trends in key outcomes from the first two months of the scheme. It is available on GOV.UK at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-2-bus-fare-cap/2-bus-fare-cap-evaluation-interim-report-february-2023>.

Patronage in the East Midlands and Leicestershire appears to be continuing to recover following the COVID-19 pandemic.

## ■ Bus Services: Franchises

**Lauren Edwards:**

[\[7246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Buses Bill would make local authority trade companies eligible to bid for bus franchises.

**Simon Lightwood:**

As announced in the King's Speech on 17 July 2024, the government will introduce a Buses Bill later this session. This will put the power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders right across England, ensuring networks meet the needs of

the communities who rely on them. The Bill will increase powers available to local leaders to choose the model that works best in their area, whether that be franchising, high-quality partnerships with private operators or local authority ownership. The Department is currently working to finalise the exact scope of the Buses Bill.

## ■ Bus Services: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[5259]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help increase the number of passenger miles travelled by bus in Lincolnshire.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government knows that Britain needs a modern transport network to help kickstart economic growth. Buses are the most commonly used mode of public transport in Britain, and good local bus services are an essential part of prosperous and sustainable communities.

Improving bus services is a key part of this Government's growth mission. The Government is determined to deliver better bus services, grow passenger numbers and drive opportunity to under-served regions. We have set out our plan to achieve this, centred around supporting local transport authorities to take back control of local bus services.

We also plan to empower local transport authorities through reforming bus funding. By giving local leaders more control and flexibility over bus funding they can plan ahead to deliver their local transport priorities. The Department will work closely with local leaders and bus operators to deliver on the government's ambitions.

## ■ Bus Services: Surrey

**Rebecca Paul:**

[5783]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the £2 bus fare cap on bus usage in (a) Reigate and Banstead Borough and (b) Surrey since its introduction.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The £2 fare cap was launched by the Department for Transport (DfT) on 1 January 2023 and is set to remain in place until the end of December 2024.

The DfT published an interim report in September 2023 setting out emerging trends in key outcomes from the first two months of the scheme. It is available on GOV.UK at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-2-bus-fare-cap/2-bus-fare-cap-evaluation-interim-report-february-2023>.

Patronage in Surrey appears to be continuing to recover following the COVID-19 pandemic. DfT does not collect patronage data lower than local transport authority level and is unable to make an assessment of bus usage for Reigate and Banstead Borough.

## ■ Chiltern Railways: Rolling Stock

**Laura Kyrke-Smith:**

[\[7353\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of Chiltern Railways' proposals to bring in (a) replacement and (b) additional carriages to improve capacity on their existing routes.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Department continues to work closely with Chiltern Railways to support the delivery of its long-term fleet strategy and has recently approved Chiltern Railways' Mk3 fleet replacement Outline Business Case (OBC). Chiltern now needs to produce the Final Business Case.

Chiltern also continues to review opportunities to maximise its passenger capacity within its current train fleet. In June 2024, Chiltern introduced an additional morning and evening peak service on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, between London Marylebone and Princes Risborough, which operated pre-COVID-19. This provides additional seating capacity in response to customer demand and crowding.

## ■ Cycling and Pedestrians: County Durham

**Mary Kelly Foy:**

[\[5364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve safety for (a) cyclists and (b) pedestrians in County Durham.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Between 2020/21 to 2023/24, almost £4,000,000 of capital funding has been invested in County Durham for new and improved schemes to improve safety and boost walking, wheeling and cycling, including on the National Cycle Network. In addition, the North East Combined Authority has been awarded over £5,600,000 of revenue funding since 2021/22.

Active Travel England has been working closely with the North East Combined Authority and its constituent local authorities to boost officer capability to design schemes that improve safety of cyclists and pedestrians. Durham also receives support through national training and engagement programmes that improve safety, including Bikeability cycle training, Walk to School Outreach and Big Bike Revival.

## ■ Cycling and Walking: Infrastructure

**James Naish:**

[\[5431\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she is taking steps to help ensure that new housing developments (a) connect to, (b) extend and (c) improve routes identified in local cycling and walking infrastructure plans.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Planning legislation identifies Active Travel England (ATE) as a statutory consultee for developments of at least 150 homes. In discharging its statutory requirements, ATE reviews how people can walk, wheel and cycle within and beyond site

boundaries, and in most instances recommends where this can be improved. Where there is a clear link, ATE recommends that funding is secured from new developments towards schemes identified in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). Ultimately, local planning decisions are for local councils but through ATE's comments, and its toolkits and guidance that are available for use by local councils, we are adding capacity, and capability, to deliver improvements in active travel provision as part of new housing developments.

### ■ Driving Tests: Neurodiversity

**Paula Barker:** [\[6609\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department collects data on driving theory test pass rates for those with (a) ADHD and (b) other neurodiverse conditions.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

If candidates with ADHD or neurodiverse conditions (or any condition that requires the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) to make special accommodations at the test centre) ask for support with taking a theory test, they need to provide evidence of the condition they have at the time of booking the test. But DVSA does not record or retain this evidence, so does not collect data on the pass rates of those who have such conditions.

### ■ Driving Tests: Waiting Lists

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[6458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate she has made of the number of additional driving tests that will be needed to reduce the average wait time for a test to the seven-week service standard.

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[6459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to increase the availability of driving tests.

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[6460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the average wait time was in each driving test area in each month since January 2015.

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[6461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many people were waiting more than 24 weeks for a driving test in each driving test area in each month since January 2015.

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[6462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the average wait time for a car driving test was at each driving test centre in each month since January 2015.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) main priority is to reduce car practical driving test waiting times, whilst upholding road safety standards.

Measures in place to reduce waiting times for customers at driving test centres, include the recruitment of driving examiners, conducting tests outside of regular hours, including at weekends and on public holidays, and buying back annual leave from driving examiners.

As of 7 October 2024, there were 571,047 car practical driving tests booked, and 89,349 driving tests available within the 24-week booking window. All available driving test appointments are shown on the live booking system, so the availability of test appointments continually changes. Test appointments are released on a rolling 24-week basis, and additional appointments are added as soon as they become available. Other candidates cancelling or rescheduling their test also free up appointments for others to book. Normal booking behaviour sees candidates move test appointments around routinely in line with their preferences. It is not therefore possible to give a meaningful assessment of the number of people waiting longer than 24 weeks for a test or how long a person waited between booking and taking a test.

DVSA continues to see high demand for driving tests, owing in part to a major shift in customer booking behaviour. Customers now book their car practical test far earlier in their learning journey, sometimes before they have even had a practical driving lesson.

The attached spreadsheet, WPQ00023819-00023823, shows the monthly average waiting time for a car practical driving test at each driving test centre and zone for each month since April 2015.

**Attachments:**

1. Driving tests - waiting times - test centres [Driving Tests waiting times - Test centres.xlsx]

**■ Driving: Disqualification****Alex Mayer:****[6922]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with her European counterparts on the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Union-wide effect of certain driving disqualifications.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

We have not had discussions with European counterparts on the proposed Directive relating to the upholding of Driving Disqualifications across the EU.

**■ Driving: Qualifications**

**Alex Mayer:** [\[5931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her planned timetable is for bringing forward changes to the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Legislative proposals to reform the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence were laid in May. This Government intends to continue with these planned reforms and expect the necessary Debates to be held soon.

**■ Local Transport Plans**

**Olly Glover:** [\[5803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her Department's planned timetable is for publishing new guidance on local transport plans.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Government is currently reviewing guidance for Local Transport Authorities on Local Transport Plans.

**■ Parking: Databases**

**Alex Mayer:** [\[6924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to take steps to encourage local authorities to join the National Parking Platform.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department has funded a pilot version of the system led by Manchester City Council since 2021, which now covers nine authorities and around 1% of the national cashless parking market. The pilot has been successful.

**■ Parking: Pedestrian Areas**

**Carla Denyer:** [\[5749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Answer of 5 March 2024 to Question 17184 and pursuant to the Answer of 3 September 2024 to Question 2507 on Parking: Pedestrian Areas, whether she plans to respond to the Local Government Association's report entitled The Path to Inclusive Footways, published on 10 February 2024.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department agrees that the design and maintenance of footways has a major impact on how useable they are for different people, particularly disabled people. The report raises a number of important issues which the Department is considering carefully.



**Rebecca Paul:**

[5796]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when she plans to respond to the consultation entitled Pavement Parking: options for change, which closed in November 2020.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

In 2020, the Department undertook a public consultation on options for changing the way pavement parking is managed outside London. We are considering the views received to inform the Government's next steps for pavement parking policy. The formal consultation response will be available to view at:

[www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-pavement-parking](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-pavement-parking).

## ■ Railway Stations: Overcrowding

**Paula Barker:**

[6610]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has had discussions with Network Rail on (a) congestion in major railway stations and (b) dangerous passenger transitions towards platforms in busy periods.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Network Rail is responsible for the safe operation and management of twenty major railway stations and is regulated by the Office of Rail and Road. Ministers and officials routinely engage with Network Rail to hold it to account for matters within its control and drive improvements for passengers.

## ■ Railways: Electrification

**Sir John Hayes:**

[5261]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will meet Network Rail to discuss electrifying the Peterborough to Doncaster railway line.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Ministers meet regularly with Network Rail and a variety of matters will be discussed.

## ■ Roads: County Durham

**Mary Kelly Foy:**

[5363]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to improve road safety in County Durham.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Local authorities are responsible for the management of local roads, within the rules set by Government. It is for the local council to decide what measures may be appropriate in their local areas.

The Safer Roads Fund is an innovative, non-competitive programme that provides funding for the most high risk rural 'A' roads in England. To date 99 roads have been funded amounting to £185.8 million - including £2.94 million this year for the A690 in County Durham.

These 99 schemes can include designing new junctions and roundabouts, improving signage and road markings, landscape management, road resurfacing, improved crossings, and cycle lanes. The Safer Roads Fund schemes are estimated to save approximately 2,600 lives and serious injuries throughout their 20-year economic life, as well as reducing congestion, improving journey times, and lowering emissions.

The safety of our roads is an absolute priority for this Government and will support our health mission. We are committed to delivering a new Road Safety Strategy – the first in over a decade. We will set out next steps on this in due course.

### ■ Roads: Rural Areas

**Anna Sabine:** [\[7232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle road traffic accidents in rural areas.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The safety of our roads is an absolute priority for this Government and will support our health mission. Since the general election, the Department has begun work on a new Road Safety Strategy, the first in over a decade. We will set out next steps on this in due course.

### ■ Trains: Manufacturing Industries

**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[5550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of newly approved open access services supporting (a) British train (i) manufacturing and (ii) assembly and (b) the wider supply chain.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Privately owned and run open access operators can play a significant role in supporting UK train manufacturers, assemblers and their UK supply chains and are an important source of potential orders, both for new and cascaded rolling stock. It remains a matter for each operator to decide when and how to source its own rolling stock.

## TREASURY

### ■ Clothing: Fringe Benefits

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** [\[6202\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether gifts of clothing are a taxable benefit in kind.

**James Murray:**

The normal rules for employment-related benefits apply to employment-related gifts, as described in HMRC guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim20020>

## ■ Film and Television: Government Assistance

**Dame Caroline Dinéage:**

[\[6037\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what fiscal steps she is taking to support the film and TV industry.

**James Murray:**

The creative industries play a key role in driving economic growth. The Government is committed to supporting the creative industries as a key part of its plan to fix the foundations of the economy.

As part of this, film and TV companies benefit from extra tax relief through the Audio-Visual Expenditure Credit, which provides generous support for production costs. A total of £1.6 billion was paid out to film and TV companies in financial year 2022-23.

In addition, on 9 October the Government announced that it will finish legislating a new Independent Film Tax Credit. This policy will go further to support independent films and develop a pipeline of UK film talent.

## ■ Film and Television: Tax Allowances

**Dame Caroline Dinéage:**

[\[6036\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of tax credits for the film and television industry on (a) the number of productions taking place in the UK, (b) foreign direct investment in the UK and (c) employment in the film and television industry; and if she will estimate the cost of those credits.

**James Murray:**

An evaluation of the creative industry tax reliefs covering Film Tax Relief, High-end Television Tax Relief, Animation Tax Relief and Children's Television Tax Relief was published in 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industry-tax-reliefs-evaluation>

The government keeps the tax system under review. HMRC decides which reliefs to evaluate against several criteria, including the annual cost associated with a relief and whether the relief's design has recently changed substantially. All tax reliefs are subject to regular assessment against the evaluation criteria.

The cost of the film and high-end television tax reliefs is published in HMRC's Creative Industries Statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/creative-industries-statistics-august-2024/>

## ■ Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties

**Helen Whately:**

[\[6358\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will introduce a national pay-per-mile road tax.

**Helen Whately:** [\[6362\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has received recent representations on the potential merits of introducing a national pay-per-mile road tax.

**James Murray:**

Revenue from motoring taxes and associated VAT ensures that the Government can continue to fund the vital public services and infrastructure that people and families across the UK expect.

Following the spending audit, the Chancellor has been clear that difficult decisions lie ahead on spending, welfare and tax to fix the foundations of our economy and address the £22 billion hole the government has inherited. Decisions on how to do that will be taken at the Budget in the round; the Chancellor makes decisions on tax policy at fiscal events.

The Government continuously reviews the tax system to ensure that it raises revenue in a way that supports growth. This involves considering representations from a range of stakeholders on various taxes and tax issues, including motoring taxes.

**Public Finance: Brexit****Stephen Gethins:** [\[6298\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on public finances.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Government has no overall estimate of the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on public finances.

As part of the Withdrawal Agreement with the EU, the UK agreed the Financial Settlement, which is a methodology for settling pre-existing UK financial obligations to the EU. The European Union Finances Statement 2023 (available in the library of the House and on Gov.uk) sets out HMT Treasury's estimates of the size of these obligations. As at December 2023, the UK is estimated to have paid £23.8bn (€27.4bn) in net liabilities to date as part of the EU financial settlement. Estimated UK outstanding net liabilities as of December 2023 were £6.4bn (€7.4bn).

**WORK AND PENSIONS****Children: Maintenance****Dave Doogan:** [\[6470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to improve the success of enforcement measures taken by the Child Maintenance Service on non-paying parents.

**Dave Doogan:**

[\[6471\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that parents are not able to avoid (a) Child Maintenance liability and (b) Deduction of Earning Orders by changing employment.

**Andrew Western:**

Where parents frequently change employment, the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) can use alternative powers such as deducting child maintenance directly from their bank account. The CMS has a range of strong enforcement options that are designed to get money flowing quickly, prevent the build-up of arrears and ensure children get the financial support they deserve. Upon changing employer, the child maintenance liability will remain unaffected unless there is also a change to income which is greater than 25%.

The Child Support (Enforcement) Act 2023 delivered primary legislation to accelerate the enforcement process. The changes seek to introduce a simpler administrative process to obtain a liability order against those paying parents who actively avoid their responsibilities, enabling the CMS to take faster enforcement action. We will monitor the effectiveness of this.

The CMS has a relatively low percentage of unpaid maintenance. Only 8% of the total maintenance due to be paid since the start of the CMS remains to be collected through the collect & pay service. This was as high as 17% in March 2015.

## ■ **Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit**

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:**

[\[6274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of incapacity benefit claimants receiving (a) Universal Credit Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity element and (b) Employment and Support Allowance are parents of dependent children.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

a) For UC, the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) and Disabled Child Entitlement breakdowns are currently temporarily unavailable on [Stat-Xplore](#) as part of the [Households on Universal Credit](#) dataset. Work is being carried out to resolve the issues and both affected measures are expected to be available in the next scheduled statistical release on 12 November 2024.

Once re-instated it should be possible to produce the number of households receiving the LCWRA element by Family Type.

Users can log in or access Stat-Xplore as a guest and, if needed, can access [guidance](#) on how to extract the information required. A [user guide to the Universal Credit Official Statistics on Stat-Xplore](#) is also available.

b) The table below shows the latest available number of claimants with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in payment who receive Child Benefit. The data is from February 2023.

	ESA CLAIMANTS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL ESA CASELOAD
Receives Child Benefit	158,028	9.7

**To note:**

- This will underestimate the number of dependent children as Child Benefit is not paid in respect of every child, for example due to them not being in full-time non-advanced education, or non-claiming due to high income.

### ■ Energy: Disadvantaged

**Vikki Slade:**[\[7334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to help (a) pensioners who will not receive Winter Fuel Allowance and (b) other people with disabilities who (i) need to run equipment through the winter and (ii) have a condition which makes them susceptible to the effects of the cold, damp weather.

**Emma Reynolds:**

This Government is committed to pensioners – everyone in our society, no matter their working history or savings deserves a comfortable and dignified retirement.

The State Pension is the foundation of income in retirement and will remain so protecting 12 million pensioners through the triple lock. Based on current forecasts, the full rate of the new state pension is set to increase by around £1,700 over the course of this Parliament.

We are also providing support for pensioners through our Warm Homes Plan which will transform homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to run. We will offer grants and low interest loans to support investment in insulation, low carbon heating and other home improvements to cut bills. We have also announced a new Warm Homes: Local Grant to help low-income homeowners and private tenants with energy performance upgrades and cleaner heating.

The Warm Home Discount scheme in England and Wales provides eligible low-income households across Great Britain with a £150 rebate on their electricity bill. This winter, we expect over three million households, including over one million pensioners, to benefit under the scheme.

The Household Support Fund is also being extended for a further six months, from 1 October 2024 until 31 March 2025. An additional £421 million will be provided to enable the extension of the Household Support Fund in England, plus funding for the Devolved Governments through the Barnett formula to be spent at their discretion, as usual.

For those with long-term illnesses, the “extra costs” disability benefits, namely Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA), provide a tax free, non-income-related contribution

towards the extra costs people with a long-term health condition can face, such as additional heating costs. They are paid monthly throughout the year. AA can be worth up to £5,600 a year and recipients are free to use their benefit according to their own priorities.

Receipt of AA can provide a passport to additional amounts in means-tested benefits (notably Pension Credit and Housing Benefit) for those on low incomes providing they meet the other eligibility criteria.

## ■ Jobcentre Plus

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:**

**[6275]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many referrals were made by Jobcentre Plus to employment support programmes that are (a) centrally contracted and (b) not centrally contracted by her Department to (i) voluntary and community sector providers, (ii) private sector providers, (iii) regional/local government providers and (iv) other in the last year.

**Alison McGovern:**

The referral statistics for the centrally contacted employment support programmes are available on GOV.UK.

[Restart Scheme statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/restart-scheme-statistics)

[Work and Health Programme statistics to May 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/work-and-health-programme-statistics-to-may-2024)

Statistics on Intensive Personalised Employment Support are planned for future publication and will be formally released, adhering to the Official Statistics guidance.

The information requested for employment support programmes not centrally contracted is not collated and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

## ■ Pension Credit

**Dr Luke Evans:**

**[5383]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what comparative assessment she has made of trends in the take up of Pension Credit between (a) July 2024 and September 2024 and (b) July 2022 and July 2024.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Pension Credit take-up statistics for Great Britain are published annually and are available at: [Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year ending 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/income-related-benefits-estimates-of-take-up-financial-year-ending-2022). The annual publication reports on the take-up of Pension Credit on a financial year basis, and so it is not possible to do a comparative assessment on a partial year time period. A comparative assessment can be made by financial years, with the next publication covering financial year ending 2023 being released on 10 October 2024.

**Luke Taylor:** [\[5498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she plans to take with local authorities to encourage pensioners to check their eligibility for Pension Credit.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Government wants everyone eligible for Pension Credit but not currently claiming it to receive the benefits they are entitled to.

The Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions wrote to all local authorities on 20<sup>th</sup> August. The letter acknowledged the vital role local authorities play in supporting their communities. The Government recognises that many local authorities already do a huge amount of work to promote benefit take-up. We are asking that local authorities support our national Pension Credit campaign and help us reach those eligible pensioners who have not claimed Pension Credit, so they continue to receive an annual Winter Fuel Payment.

We will continue to work with external partners, local authorities and the devolved governments to boost the take-up of Pension Credit.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[5582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when the threshold for pension credit was last reviewed; and when it is next set for review.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The rates of Pension Credit were last reviewed in Autumn 2023 as part of the Secretary of State's annual statutory review of State pension and benefit rates. Following that review, the Pension Credit standard minimum guarantee was increased by 8.5%, in line with the percentage increase in average earnings, to £218.15 a week for a single pensioner and £332.95 a week for a pensioner couple, with effect from 8 April 2024. Other Pension Credit amounts, including the maximum rate of Savings Credit and additional amounts for those with a severe disability or caring responsibilities, were increased by 6.7% in line with price inflation.

The next review will be undertaken following the publication in October by the Office of National Statistics of the earnings and prices indices used to inform the review, with the new rates taking effect from 7 April 2025.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[5583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of automating pension credit payments without an application process for claimants reaching retirement age on universal credit.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Households in receipt of Universal Credit are likely to see a significant change in their financial situation on reaching state pension age – at which point they may become entitled to retirement income such as the state pension, occupational or private pension or other financial product.



It cannot therefore be assumed that entitlement to Universal Credit will also mean entitlement to Pension Credit.

Eligibility to Pension Credit and the amount of any award will depend on a household's particular financial and personal circumstances on reaching retirement age. This can only be established once a successful claim is made and will be based on a range of decisions which cannot all be automated.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[5584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when the application process for Pension Credit was last reviewed.

**Emma Reynolds:**

We continually review the Pension Credit application process, with improvements made as recently as 3 September 2024. This led to the introduction of the online claim process, providing customers with a convenient alternative claim route, alongside the existing telephony and paper application methods. As the Department continues to modernise the Pension Credit service, we continue to review the user experience, balancing simplification of application with capturing the right information to ensure accuracy of award.

#### ■ Pensioners: Universal Credit

**Neil Coyle:** [\[5581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people applying for pension credit have been in receipt of universal credit in each of the last five years.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

#### ■ Pensions: Reform

**Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[6846\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans she has to reform the pensions system.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Government has already begun work to reform the pensions system:

- The Pensions Bill, confirmed in King's Speech, could boost pension pots by over £11,000 for an average earner saving over their career, with further consolidation and broader investment strategies to potentially deliver higher returns for pensions.
- Our landmark Pensions Review, launched in July, is considering how to drive efficiencies and boost investment to help increase pension pots.
- The second phase of the review will begin later this year, looking at further steps to improve pension outcomes, including assessing pension adequacy. This will

consider options to build on the success of Automatic Enrolment, which has turned millions of people into pension savers.

## ■ Social Security Benefits

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** [\[6513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she is taking steps to reform the social security system to (a) support families on low incomes and (b) reduce related mental health issues.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

I am proud to have social security in my title and this government is prioritising providing security for the most vulnerable, and this includes low income families through Universal Credit, the Household Support Fund and the wider benefits system as well as our manifesto commitments to develop a child poverty strategy and roll out free breakfast clubs in every primary school.

We will be setting out our plans for social security in due course and will fulfil our continued commitment to work with disabled people and families so that their views and voices are at the heart of all that we do.

## ■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

**Andy McDonald:** [\[5327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will respond to correspondence of 15 May 2024 from the Work and Pensions Select Committee to her predecessor, on making recommendations in relation to the report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman entitled Women's State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, published on 21 March 2024.

**Emma Reynolds:**

We will need time to review and consider the Ombudsman's report along with the evidence provided during the investigation.

We need to consider the views that have been expressed on all sides including the recommendations made by the Work and Pensions Select Committee and the points raised by representatives from the WASPI Campaign who I met on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September.

Once this work has been undertaken, the Government will be in a position to outline its approach.

**Dr Luke Evans:** [\[5376\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 22 July 2024 to Question 33 on State Retirement Pensions: Women and with reference to the report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman entitled Women's State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, published on 21 March 2024, what steps her Department is taking to consider the issues in the report.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Work is ongoing to consider the Ombudsman's report and the views that have been expressed on all sides including the recommendations made by the Work and Pensions Select Committee and the points raised by representatives from the WASPI Campaign who I met on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September.

Once this work has been undertaken, the Government will be in a position to outline its approach.

**■ Winter Fuel Payment: Reigate****Rebecca Paul:**[\[5774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments on pensioners in Reigate constituency.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Pension Credit data that is used is based on the 2010 Westminster Parliamentary constituencies, not 2024, in order to be comparable with the Winter Fuel Payments statistics. It is estimated that around 17,000 people in Reigate constituency will be affected by the change to the eligibility criteria for Winter Fuel Payments. This is based on Feb-24 Pension Credit statistics and 22-23 Winter Fuel Payments statistics (sources below).

This estimation is calculated by subtracting the number of Pension Credit recipients for Reigate constituency from the number of Winter Fuel Payment recipients for Reigate constituency. This is essentially the number of Winter Fuel Payment recipients pre-policy change not claiming Pension Credit, as an estimate of those who will no longer receive Winter Fuel Payment.

Also, the above figures do not take into account any potential increase in Pension Credit take-up we might see as a result of the Government's Pension Credit Awareness Campaign. We do not have data on those additional Pension Credit claims by Parliamentary constituencies or local authorities.

Furthermore, the published Pension Credit figures refer to households, so the number of individuals will be higher (i.e., taking account of households where it is a couple claiming Pension Credit).

In addition to that, Pension Credit claimants are the majority of those that will be eligible for Winter Fuel Payments, not all. There are other pensioners who are eligible for Winter Fuel Payments (as they claim other means tested benefits) but they are not considered in these figures as it is not possible to do so.

**Source:**

The Winter Fuel Payments statistics are published here:

Winter Fuel Payment statistics for winter 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

Pension Credit data is published here: [Pension Credit – Data from May 2018](#)

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

#### ■ Independent Film Tax Credit

**Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant):** [\[HCWS115\]](#)

Today the government has laid regulations to bring in the Independent Film Tax Credit (IFTC). This will provide an uplift to our existing Audio-Visual Expenditure Credit (AVEC) specifically targeted to support the growth and success of low-budget British films. These regulations set out the eligibility criteria for film production companies, who will be able to apply for an eligibility certificate from the British Film Institute from 30 October this year. Companies will be able to apply to HMRC to claim the IFTC from 1 April 2025.

These regulations create the mechanism for low-budget film productions and international film co-productions to apply for tax relief in the form of an enhanced AVEC. This targeted uplift will be at a higher rate of 53% compared to the normal rate of 34% for other films.

The regulations include a Budget Condition to ensure that this tax relief specifically targets independent productions with a budget of up to £15 million.

To avoid productions with budgets slightly over £15 million receiving a much lower amount of relief, films with core budgets of up to £23.5 million are eligible. The IFTC has a cap of £6.36 million on the total cash credit receivable, which is based on qualifying core expenditure (i.e. 'core budget') of £15 million. This creates a taper in the proportionate value of the credit for films with core budgets above £15 million.

The enhanced AVEC rate will be available for £15 million of a production's budget. There is also a "Modified Creative Connection" condition which means that the film must have a director or scriptwriter who is a British Citizen or ordinarily resident in the UK, or be an official UK co-production. Finally the regulations also detail the particulars and evidence that applicants will need to provide in order to access this enhanced relief.

The regulations have been laid alongside Appointed Day regulations which mean that from 30 October 2024, eligible companies will be able to apply for certification for this enhanced uplift. Film production companies can claim this enhanced relief in relation to films whose principal photography began on or after 1 April 2024. HMRC will begin accepting applications on 1 April 2025.

Both [the Corporation Tax \(Certification as Low-Budget Film\) Regulations 2024](#) and [the Finance \(No. 2\) Act 2024 \(Applications for Certification as Low-Budget Film: Appointed Day\) Regulations 2024](#) have been published on [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk).