



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 21 October 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (08:28 P.M., 21 October 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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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

#### ■ Foreign Investment in UK

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[9130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what (a) plans for investment in and (b) other plans for UK (i) nations and (ii) regions have been agreed as a result of the international investment summit on 14 October 2024.

**Sarah Jones:**

At the International Investment Summit we announced a total of £63 billion of investment with nearly 38,000 jobs to be created across the UK. DBT is committed to building on the success of the summit and continuing to attract and retain investment across the whole of the UK. We also announced we will be expanding the Office for Investment to become the UK's investment promotion function. The Office for Investment will work across government and UK nations and regions to drive inward investment and deliver on our collective mission to drive growth across the UK.

#### ■ Manufacturing Industries: Government Assistance

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[7770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to support manufacturing in the UK.

**Sarah Jones:**

This government wants to drive manufacturing growth. Manufacturing makes an important contribution to private capital, R&D, and exports, which leads to higher productivity, more investment and more jobs.

Building on existing support to industry, government will introduce a new Industrial Strategy to drive long-term sustainable, inclusive and secure growth - through securing investment into crucial sectors of the economy.

As announced in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper published on 14 October, advanced manufacturing has been selected as one of eight growth-driving sectors. The Strategy will also look at support for subsectors which provide critical inputs and infrastructure to these sectors.

#### ■ Zero-hours Contracts

**Andrew Cooper:**

[\[9368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate he has made of the prevalence of zero-hours contracts in the labour market in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

**Justin Madders:**

The latest figures (for April to June 2024) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggest that around 1,030,000 people (3.1% of total employment) were employed on a zero-hours contract in the UK.

ONS do not publish constituency level data on zero-hours contracts, however Cheshire is part of the North West (England) region in the ONS regional breakdowns. Over the same period, there were approximately 100,000 people (2.7% of total employment) employed on a zero-hours contract in the North West, and approximately 890,000 people employed on a zero-hours contract in England as a whole (3.2% of total employment).

**CABINET OFFICE****■ 10 Downing Street: Repairs and Maintenance****John Glen:**[\[8815\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 30 August 2024 to Question 1256 on 10 Downing Street: Repairs and Maintenance, what the estimated budget for refurbishment is for this financial year; and what works have taken place since 4 July 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

I refer the Rt Hon Member to my answer to Question 1256 on 31 July 2024. As was the practice under the previous Administration, there is a £30,000 redecoration and modernisation allowance.

**■ Cabinet Office: Buildings****Alex Burghart:**[\[6416\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to use 36 Whitehall.

**Georgia Gould:**

The 36 Whitehall building is not in use and there are no current plans to bring it back into use.

**■ Cabinet Office: Paternity Leave****Shaun Davies:**[\[7898\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the average length of paternity leave taken by staff in his Department was in each of the last three years.

**Georgia Gould:**

Our records show that between 2021 and October 2024, 258 Cabinet Office employees have taken paternity leave for the birth or adoption of a child.



The average working days taken (AWDT) is shown in the table below.

YEAR	AWDT
2021	5
2022	6
2023	5.7
2024 (Jan to Oct)	6

## ■ Cabinet Office: Social Media

**John Glen:**

[\[8643\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what his Department's policy is on the use of (a) Tiktok, (b) WeChat and (c) Telegram on (i) Government communications devices and (ii) Ministers' non-corporate communications devices.

### **Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

In March 2023 the previous government introduced a precautionary ban specifically on the TikTok application on government mobile devices following a security review, alongside announcing new policy on the control of all third-party applications on government devices. The precautionary ban on TikTok remains in place.

The cross-government Mobile Device Management (MDM) policy was published in 2023. The policy requires all government organisations and their Arm's Length Bodies to control which third-party apps can be installed and run on corporate mobile devices using an allow list of approved apps or, in exceptional circumstances only, using a deny list of apps that are specifically prohibited.

The government does not have specific policy on use of the WeChat or Telegraph applications on government devices - this is because the MDM policy provides a comprehensive, strategic response to the risks posed to government device data, as opposed to taking a more piecemeal "app-by-app" approach. This ensures that we are not only addressing the immediate, known risks but also future-proofing HMG against new risks as they emerge.

The MDM policy does not extend to Ministers' personally owned devices. Due to the sensitive nature of their role, Ministers receive regular security briefings and advice on protecting their data and mitigating cyber threats, including briefing on using social media securely and the security of electronic communications. Under Cabinet Office guidance published in 2023 on use of non-corporate communications channels for government business, in general it is expected that ministers use government systems for government business.

**■ Cabinet Office: Trade Union Officials**

**John Glen:** [\[8814\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 September 2024 to Question 5051 on Civil Servants: Trade Union Officials, if he will publish the (a) supporting guidance and (b) facility time agreements signed by his Department.

**Georgia Gould:**

As was the case when the Rt Hon member was a minister in the department, this agreement and supporting guidance are not published.

**■ Civil Servants: Career Development and Recruitment**

**John Glen:** [\[8806\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance he has issued on whether (a) an applicant's and (b) their parent's socio-economic background should be considered in (i) promotion and (ii) employment decisions in the Civil Service.

**Georgia Gould:**

The socio-economic background of applicants or their parents does not form part of the promotion or employment decisions in the Civil Service.

All Civil Service Recruitment is governed by the Civil Service Recruitment Principles. They outline the legal requirement for selection for appointment to the Civil Service to be made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

The Civil Service Management Code outlines that Departments and agencies must ensure that all promotions and lateral transfers follow from a considered decision as to the fitness of individuals, on merit, to undertake the duties concerned.

The Civil Service approach to recruitment is anonymised by default to support the consideration of candidates for promotion and employment based on merit alone.

**■ Civil Servants: Recruitment**

**John Glen:** [\[6064\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if the Prime Minister will ask the Committee on Standards in Public Life to hold an inquiry on the application of the Civil Service Commission Recruitment Principles.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL) is independent of the Cabinet Office. The Committee is currently carrying out a review looking at accountability within public bodies and will announce any future reviews in due course.

**■ Civil Servants: Remote Working**

**John Glen:** [\[8429\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 16 September 2024, to Question 4646, on Civil Servants: Remote Working, if he will cite each of the research

studies that his Department reviewed to inform the expectations on office and remote working.

**Georgia Gould:**

There are a range of studies and data in the public domain that consider the evidence and trends on the benefits of hybrid working practices which were considered.

Sources included published reports from organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

■ **Civil Service: Discrimination**

**John Glen:**

[\[8120\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to tackle misogyny in the Civil Service.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Civil Service is committed to creating a safe and supportive work environment for its employees, including women, and will not tolerate any form of harassment, unacceptable behaviour, abuse, or misogynistic behaviour by any party, towards any employee.

Departments have their own policies and guidance on dealing with unacceptable behaviour including handling situations of, for example, harassment, assault against staff or misogynistic behaviour.

■ **Government Departments: Disclosure of Information**

**John Glen:**

[\[8638\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 16 September 2024, to Question 5052, on Government Departments: Disclosure of Information, whether his Department has cancelled the launch of the transparency portal for consolidated government data.

**John Glen:**

[\[8817\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 16 September 2024 to Question 5052 on Government Departments: Disclosure of Information, what his planned timetable is for the launch of the new transparency portal for consolidated government data.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

This government is committed to looking at how the range of transparency data published can be improved and made as useful as possible.

■ **Government Departments: Policy**

**John Glen:**

[\[8808\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that all Departments use an appropriate level of evaluation to assess the (a) design, (b) implementation and (c) outcomes of new interventions.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Evaluation Task Force continues to work with Departments to ensure robust and proportionate evaluations of government programmes are carried out and published.

**Government Departments: Staff****John Glen:****[8125]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the timetable is for publication on gov.uk of 2024 data for Organograms of Staff Roles and Salaries for each Department.

**Georgia Gould:**

The requirements for the publication of departmental Senior Civil Service (SCS) organograms remain in place. Each individual department is required to publish this information regularly on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and is responsible for their own publication.

**Infected Blood Compensation Scheme****Sorcha Eastwood:****[7953]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) claims under the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme can be inherited by the families of deceased claimants and (b) people who are unable to receive their payments due to health issues do not lose their right to compensation upon passing.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:**

Where a person who would have been eligible to apply to the Scheme as an infected person has tragically died, the personal representatives of the deceased person's estate can apply for compensation on behalf of the estate of the deceased infected person. Where compensation is payable to someone who lacks capacity, including due to health issues, the award will be paid to the person with power of attorney or other legal authority to act on the person's behalf. In both cases, the acting representative must make the application to the Scheme. In line with the Inquiry's recommendation, where an affected person has died it is not possible for the personal representatives of their estate to apply for compensation.

**Ministers: Corporate Hospitality****John Glen:****[7431]**

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance his Department issues on the circumstances in which hospitality received by Ministers at party conferences should be declared.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Ministerial Code sets out rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality in a ministerial capacity.

Any hospitality, above the relevant thresholds, received by a minister in their capacity as MP or Peer should be declared on the parliamentary register, in line with the rules set by Parliament.

**■ Ministers: Official Gifts**

**John Glen:** [\[8804\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to change the (a) reporting regime and (b) threshold at which Ministers must declare (i) hospitality and (ii) gifts.

**Georgia Gould:**

I refer the Right Honourable Member to the debate in the House on Reporting Ministerial Gifts and Hospitality, debated on Monday 14 October 2024. The Government will set out further details in due course.

**■ Ministers: Pay**

**John Glen:** [\[8810\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to uprate the salaries of Lords Ministers in line with inflation.

**Georgia Gould:**

Salary entitlements for ministers are set out by the Ministerial and other Salaries Act 1975. The salaries ministers will claim in this government will be confirmed in due course and published on gov.uk.

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** [\[8821\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the salary for a Minister will be in each of the next five financial years.

**Georgia Gould:**

Salary entitlements for ministers are set out by the Ministerial and other Salaries Act 1975. The salaries ministers will claim in this government will be confirmed in due course and published on gov.uk.

**■ Prime Minister: Aviation**

**John Glen:** [\[8434\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 4 September 2024 to Question 2304 on Prime Minister: Aviation, on what proportion of Prime Ministerial (a) domestic and (b) overseas flights sustainable aviation fuel has been used; and on which flights, since 5 July 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Government uses sustainable aviation fuel wherever possible. My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Transport set out to the House on 22 July 2024 our plans to support the development, production, and use of sustainable aviation fuel.

**■ Prime Minister: Correspondence****John Glen:** [\[8118\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 10 September 2024, to Question 5001, on Prime Minister: Correspondence, what the 10 Downing Street fax number is for public correspondence.

**Georgia Gould:**

The fax number is 020 7925 0918, which remains unchanged from the previous administration.

**■ Prime Minister: Pay****John Glen:** [\[8128\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the Prime Minister's current (a) claimed annual salary and (b) entitled annual salary is (i) including and (ii) excluding his Parliamentary salary.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Prime Minister's claimed annual salary is £75,440. His entitled annual salary is £80,807.

His parliamentary salary is £91,346. His total annual claimed salary is therefore £166,786.

**■ Prime Minister: Universal Music Publishing Group****Paul Holmes:** [\[9000\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what discussions (a) the Prime Minister has and (b) the Prime Minister's officials have had with representatives of Universal Music Publishing Group since 4 July 2024.

**Georgia Gould:**

As was the practice under the previous Administration, information about official ministerial meetings with external organisations and individuals will be published as part of the Cabinet Office transparency returns and made available on the GOV.UK website.

**■ Procurement****Jim Shannon:** [\[7782\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Written Statement on Procurement Act 2023 Update of 12 September 2024, HCWS90, what the changes to the National Procurement Policy Statement are that entail the delay in implementation of the Procurement Act 2023.

**Georgia Gould:**

It is important that the new procurement regime commences with a statutory National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS) aligned to the Government's strategic

priorities. The new NPPS will set out a mission-led procurement regime which meets the challenge of applying the full potential of public procurement to deliver value for money, economic growth and social value. The NPPS will be informed by stakeholder engagement taking place over the coming months.

## ■ Public Appointments

**John Glen:** [\[6077\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether direct ministerial appointments by departmental Ministers require the prior approval of 10 Downing Street.

**Georgia Gould:**

As was the case under the last administration, Number 10 should be consulted before a direct ministerial appointment is entered into.

## ■ Senior Civil Servants: Recruitment

**John Glen:** [\[7754\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 23 September 2024 to Question 5031 on Senior Civil Servants: Recruitment, whether he made an assessment of the potential merits of externally advertising the five mission delivery board civil service roles.

**Georgia Gould:**

The internal appointment of Directors General (DGs) as Mission Senior Responsible Officers was undertaken as part of the standard management of roles within the DG workforce. As such, there was no need to assess the merits of advertising these roles externally.

## ■ Special Advisers

**John Glen:** [\[6074\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the Government's policy is on (a) the total number of special advisers to be appointed across Government and (b) the gender balance of special advisers across Government.

**Georgia Gould:**

Special Advisers are appointed in accordance with the Ministerial Code. Details on Special Adviser appointments are provided in the relevant Annual Report on Special Advisers.

**John Glen:** [\[8819\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether there is a regular cross-departmental meeting of special advisers.

**Georgia Gould:**

I refer the Rt Hon member to PQ7444.

**■ Special Advisers: Lobbying****John Glen:** [\[7432\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will take steps to ensure that consultant lobbying with special advisers is recorded by the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Government will consider whether any reforms are needed to the regulation of lobbying as part of its wider work on ethics and integrity.

**■ Victims and Prisoners Act 2024****Layla Moran:** [\[8671\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to ensure (a) payments are made to affected persons within three months of the passage of the Prisoners and Victims Act 2024 and (b) its compliance with other provisions of that Act.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:**

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 required the Government to lay regulations to establish the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme within three months of the passing of the Act. On 23 August, we laid regulations that will give the Infected Blood Compensation Authority the powers necessary to pay compensation through the core route to the infected, both living and deceased. The Government expects the Infected Blood Compensation Authority to begin making payments to people who are infected under the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme by the end of this year. Payments to the affected are expected to begin in 2025, following a second set of regulations. Regarding other provisions of the Act, applications for interim payments of £100,000 to the estates of deceased people, whose deaths have not yet been recognised by a previous interim payment, will open in October. The Government takes its responsibilities under the Victims and Prisoners Act seriously and is doing everything possible to deliver compensation in a timely manner.

**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT****■ Gambling: Reform****Tom Gordon:** [\[9005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what progress her Department has made on implementing the reforms outlined in the white paper entitled High stakes: gambling reform for the digital age, published in April 2023; and what her planned timeline is for the full implementation of the proposals.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

We are committed to reviewing the best available evidence from a wide range of sources and working with all stakeholders in order to support the sector and ensure there are robust protections in place to protect those at risk. We will provide further updates to the House soon.



The Gambling Commission is responsible for the implementation of a number of the regulatory reforms set out in the white paper, such as introducing new regulations to make online games safer and financial vulnerability checks aimed at reducing cases of unaffordable losses. It has consulted on and implemented the majority of these reforms.

## ■ **Tourism: Bedfordshire**

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[8701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of future opportunities to grow the tourism industry in Bedfordshire.

**Chris Bryant:**

Tourism is a significant driver of economic growth and employment and the government is committed to growing this sector and enabling more inbound and domestic visitors to experience the full diversity of the UK tourism sector across the country. Bedfordshire boasts attractions such as The Panacea Museum, and welcomes 273,000 visits with a spend of £108 million according to the latest estimates. The Government is committed to ensuring that it remains attractive to inbound and domestic visitors across its towns and rural areas.

## ■ **Tourism: Rural Areas**

**Edward Morello:**

[\[8621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to take steps to help increase tourism in rural constituencies where (a) small businesses and (b) cultural landmarks rely on visitors.

**Chris Bryant:**

Yes, the Government wants to grow tourism across all parts of the country and recognises the importance of tourism to rural constituencies.

DCMS works with VisitBritain/VisitEngland to champion visits to the British countryside to a worldwide audience, and promoting rural areas such as the South Downs, Northumberland, Pembrokeshire and the Yorkshire Dales. DCMS, through VisitEngland, has also accredited 33 Local Visitor Economy Partnerships so far; which aims to drive investment and spend across the regions - including in rural and coastal areas.

Regarding cultural landmarks, DCMS will continue to work collaboratively across government departments and with the sector to support marketing campaigns that attract more visitors to heritage sites and cultural destinations across the regions to stimulate inbound demand.

**■ UK Commission on Covid Commemoration****Sorcha Eastwood:**[\[8706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department plans to take forward recommendations from the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration: Final Report, published in March 2023.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

We are considering the Commission's recommendations and have been working with bereaved family groups and other stakeholders, including other government departments and Devolved Governments.

We want to do justice to the hard work of the Commission for Covid Commemoration and carefully consider our response to all of the recommendations.

While we cannot commit to an exact date for publication of the government response, we are working to publish soon.

**DEFENCE****■ Defence Equipment & Support: Public Appointments****Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[8948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress he has made on establishing a National Armaments Director.

**Maria Eagle:**

We are in the process of finalising the job advert for the National Armaments Director role. The National Armaments Director recruitment is expected to launch imminently.

**■ Defence: Bedfordshire****Blake Stephenson:**[\[8704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the role of Bedfordshire in the UK's military supply chain.

**Maria Eagle:**

The East of England plays an important role in defending the UK from growing threats and Defence's contribution to the economy, with approximately £1.4 billion of Ministry of Defence (MOD) spend in the region in 2022-23. Bedfordshire in particular is home to a number of our strategic suppliers and a variety of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises working in defence, underlining the importance of the county in the Defence supply chain.

Mid Bedfordshire also hosts the prestigious DVD (Defence Vehicle Demonstration) Event, providing opportunities for industry and key MOD stakeholders to develop next-generation capabilities to meet the requirements of a modern, lethal army.

## ■ Fleet Solid Support Ships: Shipbuilding

**Graeme Downie:**

[\[8590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what locations are being considered for the (a) build and (b) assembly of the fleet solid support ships.

**Luke Pollard:**

Successful delivery of the Fleet Solid Support (FSS) Ships project remains a priority. On current plans, the three FSS ships will be assembled from blocks which are expected to be built in Harland & Wolff (H&W) shipyards in Belfast and Appledore in Devon and Navantia's shipyard in Cadiz, Spain. Assembly and integration of the ships is planned to take place in Belfast.

Following a review of H&W's financial situation, the Government is clear that the market is best placed to address the challenges the company is facing. We continue to work extensively with all parties to find an outcome for the company that continues to deliver shipbuilding and manufacturing in the UK.

## ■ Helicopters: Official Visits

**John Glen:**

[\[6066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the planned discontinuation of the Rotary Wing Command Support Air Transport Helicopter Service, whether (a) the Prime Minister, (b) other Ministers, (c) members of the Royal Family and (d) senior defence staff will be permitted to use in sourced (i) Royal Air Force and (ii) Royal Navy helicopters for travel in their official capacities.

**Maria Eagle:**

An alternative framework for VIP air transport and military command support air transport is being considered. The review will explore means of delivery and consider cost-effectiveness while ensuring the important military command function can be met appropriately.

## ■ Ministry of Defence: Land

**Tom Morrison:**

[\[7934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to prevent trail hunting on land (a) owned and (b) managed by his Department.

**Maria Eagle:**

This Government was elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans to improve animal welfare in a generation, including the banning of trail hunting. Licenses to trail hunt on Ministry of Defence (MOD) land are currently under Ministerial review. To date, no licenses to trail hunt on MOD land have been granted for the 2024-25 hunting season, pending Ministerial review.

**■ Ministry of Defence: Official Cars****Charlie Dewhurst:****[7009]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's policy is on the allocation of Government Car Service cars to senior officials; what the policy was on 24 May 2024; and which senior officials have been granted access to the service since 4 July 2024.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Government Car Service (GCS) offers vehicles to Government Departments as a shared resource. Each Department independently determines the allocation of these vehicles. The arrangements relating to the using of vehicles in the Government Car Service is set out in the Civil Service Management Code. There has been no change in this policy since the General Election.

**■ Nuclear Submarines: Decommissioning****Graeme Downie:****[8733]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when his Department will publish a Contract Notice for Submarine Disposal following the Market Interest Day held on 6 July 2023.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Submarine Disposal Capability project was established in 2022 to identify an enduring disposal solution. The project is in its Concept Phase and market engagements were undertaken in July 2023 and June 2024 to inform the optimum way ahead.

The next phase of this work is to develop a business case for approval which will set out the approach and future timelines for any procurement action, including further market engagement, such as the publishing of a Contract Notice.

**Graeme Downie:****[8734]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to hold discussions with his AUKUS counterparts on including the Submarine Dismantling Project in that partnership.

**Maria Eagle:**

As part of the AUKUS partnership, Australia will be responsible for the disposal of its own conventionally-armed, nuclear powered submarines. While there are no plans to include the Submarine Dismantling Project as part of AUKUS, the UK Government continues to support the Australian Government to develop their own plans for the disposal of their retired nuclear powered submarines, including decommissioning, defueling, dismantling, recycling, and the management of the used fuel following its removal.

## ■ Strategic Defence Review

**James Cartlidge:** [\[9487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 8456 on Strategic Defence Review, whether all submissions received for the Strategic Defence Review will initially be read in full by a human being.

**Luke Pollard:**

Artificial intelligence aids in reviewing and analysing submissions during the Strategic Defence Review process. However, AI is not a replacement of human involvement, but an enabler of greater efficiency and just one part of the process. This tool helps the team concentrate on tasks like detailed reading and discussion.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[9488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 8456 on Strategic Defence Review, how his Department plans to use artificial intelligence to help comprehend the content of submissions to the Strategic Defence Review on defence expenditure.

**Luke Pollard:**

Artificial intelligence aids in reviewing and analysing submissions during the Strategic Defence Review process, which include recommendations on defence expenditure. However, AI is not a replacement of human involvement, but an enabler of greater efficiency and just one part of the process. This tool helps the team concentrate on tasks like detailed reading and discussion.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[9489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 8456 on Strategic Defence Review, which company was awarded the contract to collate responses to the Strategic Defence Review using artificial intelligence.

**James Cartlidge:** [\[9490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 8456 on Strategic Defence Review, whether there was a contracting process for the artificial intelligence software being used to assess responses to the Strategic Defence Review.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is working within Defence's digital ecosystem to support the Strategic Defence Review, consistent with the Department's Digital and Data Strategy. As part of the SDR, MOD has contracted under the Defence and Security Public Contracts Regulations (DSPCR), Regulation 16. An exemption can be used in certain situations where a contract is specifically for the purpose of research and development.

The tool is enhancing the team's ability to focus on high-value tasks, such as in-depth reading and discussion of the submissions, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive Review. AI is not a replacement, but an enabler of greater efficiency and just one part

of the process. The Reviewers and supporting team are applying robust challenge to submissions through Panel Sessions during October and November.

## ■ Ukraine: Military Aid

**Nigel Farage:** [\[8696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the UK's military support for Ukraine on the readiness of the armed forces.

**Luke Pollard:**

The Government's first priority is ensuring the security of the nation and its citizens. The Prime Minister has confirmed that the UK will provide £3 billion a year in military support every year for as long as it takes.

The Prime Minister has launched the Strategic Defence Review to ensure that Defence is both capable and affordable now and into the future.

Readiness levels are regularly reviewed in relation to the threats faced by both the UK and NATO, and military assets are deployed accordingly. The Ministry of Defence remains fully engaged with industry, allies and partners to ensure both the continuation of supply to Ukraine, and that all equipment and munitions granted in kind from UK stocks are replaced as rapidly as possible.

## EDUCATION

## ■ BTEC Qualifications

**Alex Ballinger:** [\[8731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans her Department has to consult (a) teachers and (b) students in relation to its planned phase-out of BTEC qualifications.

**Janet Daby:**

This government has not set out plans to phase out applied general qualifications.

In July, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced the review of qualifications reform. The rapid review is focused on Level 3 qualifications currently scheduled to have funding removed on 31 July 2025.

The department has an extensive programme of engagement underway, to ensure that the views of colleges, schools and teachers are fed into the review of qualifications reform. The department has already held a Ministerial chaired round table with key leaders in the college sector and is undertaking a series of focus groups and interviews with colleges, schools and other organisations to ensure that the views of stakeholders are fully considered. These events include key leaders from across the further education sector, as well as subject teachers and leaders of curriculum in institutions. In addition, departmental officials are using the latest student data and information available to inform the review.

## ■ Class Sizes: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[8628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to reduce class sizes in Lincolnshire.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The average class size for state-funded primary schools in Lincolnshire is 25.5 pupils, which is below the national average of 26.6 pupils. The average class size for state-funded secondary schools in Lincolnshire is 21.5 pupils, which again is below the national average of 22.4 pupils.

Legislation limits the size of an infant class to 30 pupils per school teacher. An infant class is one in which the majority of children will reach the age of five, six, or seven during the school year, which includes reception, year 1 and year 2.

There is no statutory limit on the size of classes for older children (pupils aged eight and over), and it is up to schools to decide how to organise classes based on local needs and circumstances to ensure all children can be supported to achieve and thrive.

It is local authorities who have responsibility to ensure there are sufficient school places in their area. The department provides capital funding through the Basic Need Grant to support local authorities to provide school places. Lincolnshire will receive £21.5 million in 2025/26 to support the provision of new school places needed by September 2026.

## ■ Holiday Activities and Food Programme

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[8724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) extending the Holiday Activities and Food Programme beyond March 2025 and (b) introducing other measures to help ensure children from low-income households have access to healthy meals during school holidays.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The future of the Holiday Activities and Food programme beyond 31 March 2025 is subject to the next government Spending Review taking place this autumn and the department will communicate the outcome of that process in due course.

## ■ Private Education: Special Educational Needs

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[8725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will take steps to help reduce the potential impact of the introduction of VAT on independent school fees for children at independent schools (a) who need SEND support and (b) do not have an ECHP.

**Stephen Morgan:**

Local authorities fund pupils' places in private schools where their needs can only be met in a private school. For example, in England, where attendance at a private school is required by a child's education, health and care plan, local authorities will be able to reclaim the VAT on the fees from HMRC.

Where parents have chosen to send their child to private school rather than a local authority deeming it necessary, VAT will apply to fees. The department works to support local authorities to ensure that every local area has sufficient places for children that need them and works to provide appropriate support where pupils with special educational needs (SEN) require a place at a state-funded school. For most pupils with SEN, support is provided within a mainstream school.

**■ Pupils: Epilepsy****James McMurdock:****[9085]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve support for children with epilepsy in schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

It is the government's ambition that schools should be well supported to meet the needs of their pupils, enabling them all to achieve and thrive.

Section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units to make arrangements for supporting pupils with medical conditions. Some children with medical conditions may be considered to be disabled under the definition set out in the Equality Act 2010. Where this is the case, governing bodies must comply with their duties under that Act.

Governing bodies should ensure that all schools develop a policy for supporting pupils with medical conditions that is reviewed regularly and is readily accessible to parents and school staff. They must ensure that the arrangements put in place are sufficient to meet their statutory responsibilities and should ensure that policies, plans, procedures and systems are properly and effectively implemented.

**■ Special Educational Needs****Dr Ben Spencer:****[9573]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which schools are participating in the Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme; and how much funding is provided to each school as part of the Early Language and Support for Every Child in Surrey.

**Stephen Morgan:**

There are 11,100 schools registered for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme currently, following the continuation of the programme for an additional academic year, which was announced in July 2024. The full list of schools registered to deliver the NELI programme is published online at the following link: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/neli-nuffield-early-language-intervention-programme](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neli-nuffield-early-language-intervention-programme).



The department and NHSE are funding nine Early Language and Support Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders, one per Department for Education region and each receiving £500,000 in the 2024/25 financial year.

### ■ **Special Educational Needs: Finance**

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[8952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to reform the funding formula used to distribute SEND funds.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department is taking time to consider the various funding formulae that the department and local authorities use to allocate funding for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It is important that there is a fair education funding system, that directs funding to where it is needed.

Budgets for the 2025/26 financial year have not yet been finalised, which means that high needs and schools national funding formula allocations for that year have not been published to the usual timescales. The department will publish information as soon as possible after the Budget announcement on 30 October.

### ■ **Young People: Mobile Phones**

**James Naish:**

[\[8686\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to take steps to (a) understand more about the relationship between smartphone use and young people's mental health, (b) reduce any negative impact of those devices on young people's mental health and (c) bring forward legislative proposals on the use of smartphones in schools.

**Stephen Morgan:**

Schools are required by law to have a behaviour policy that sets out what is expected of all pupils, including what items are banned from school premises. Additionally, the government's non-statutory guidance supports schools on how to develop, implement and maintain a policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones throughout the school day. Headteachers are responsible for implementation of guidance within their schools.

Research suggests excessive screentime can be detrimental to children's wellbeing. The Online Safety Act aims to protect children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content and to ensure that technology companies take more responsibility for the safety of their users, particularly children.

**ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO****■ Carbon Emissions**

**Josh Babarinde:** [\[8294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he plans to take to support (a) households and (b) organisations to reduce their carbon footprint.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government's 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 announced the new Warm Homes: Local Grant to help low-income homeowners and private tenants with energy performance upgrades including insulation, as well as the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund, to support social housing providers and tenants. More detail will be provided in due course.

Small and medium-sized organisations can visit the UK Business Climate Hub for advice and support, run in partnership with government. Climate Change Agreements provide tax discounts for businesses reducing their emissions, and the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund supports industrial sites with high energy use to transition. We are currently running a pilot in the West Midlands, providing energy audits and grants to small and medium businesses to support them in decarbonising .

**■ Energy: Disability**

**James McMurdock:** [\[9083\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to support disabled households with the cost of energy.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government believes that the only way to permanently protect billpayers, including disabled households, is to speed up the transition towards homegrown clean energy and reduce our reliance on volatile international fossil fuel markets.

Whilst we make this transition, the Government is committed to ensuring vulnerable households are supported with their energy bills. We are looking at all options on how to make energy bills more affordable for these households.

In the short-term, we are continuing to deliver the Warm Home Discount which provides a £150 annual rebate on energy bills for eligible low-income households. We are also working with energy suppliers to ensure they are providing additional support to vulnerable customers that are struggling with bills.

**■ Energy: Housing**

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[8746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much funding he plans to provide for home insulation in each of the next three years; and if he will make it

his policy (a) for all homes to have an efficiency rating of band C or higher by 2035 and (b) to publish the Warm Homes Plan by the end of 2024.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

Funding announcements will be confirmed at the upcoming Spending Review.

The government is considering options to ensure a fair, proportionate and affordable approach to improving the energy performance of owner-occupied homes. We will consult this year on proposals for private and social rented homes to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030.

The Warm Homes Plan will offer grants and low interest loans to support investment in insulation and other home improvements. We will set out further detail on delivering our Warm Homes Plan next Spring.

■ **Energy: North Sea**

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[8708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what progress his Department has made on the implementation of the Declarations between the UK and North Seas countries at the North Sea Summit in April 2023.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Ostend Declarations commit signatories to delivering cross-border projects in the North Seas, and set out a shared target of 300GW of offshore wind in the North Seas by 2050.

We are committed to radically increasing the deployment of offshore wind, essential to meet our net zero goals. The UK is a world leader in offshore wind, with 14.8 GW of generation capacity, the highest deployment in Europe.

We have been working closely with the North Seas partners to unlock the renewable potential of the North Seas, including offshore wind and offshore hybrid assets. Minister McCarthy will attend the North Seas Energy Cooperation Ministerial Meeting in Denmark on 24 October to advance these goals, and we are preparing for the North Sea Summit in Hamburg next June.

■ **Energy: Standing Charges**

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[8860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if his Department will consult on the use of energy standing charges.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

Although standing charges are a commercial matter for suppliers, and are regulated by Ofgem, we know that too much of the burden of the bill is placed on them. The Government has worked constructively with the regulator on the issue of standing charges, and we are committed to lowering the cost of them.

Ofgem's recently published discussion paper sets out the options for how standing charges could be reduced, including by moving some supplier operational costs off standing charges onto the unit rate, increasing the variety of tariffs available for consumer in the market, and in the longer term, reviewing how system costs are allocated. Ofgem's publication can be found here: <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/call-for-input/standing-charges-domestic-retail-options>.

## ■ Environment Protection: Industry

**Mary Glendon:** [\[8822\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6235 on Environment Protection: Industry, if he will take steps with the Office for Clean Energy Jobs to support workers from high carbon sectors move into clean energy jobs as part of the transition to net zero.

**Sarah Jones:**

Our ambitious Clean Energy Mission will be an incredible opportunity for jobs and investment all across the country, supporting the Growth Mission. The Office for Clean Energy Jobs will support workers from high carbon sectors to move to clean energy jobs by targeting skill interventions to reskill and upskill workers. We will continue to coordinate our approach to ensure a just transition across Government, including working closely with Skills England.

## ■ Geothermal Energy: Heating

**Lee Anderson:** [\[8862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he plans to help increase the use of geothermal energy for heating in (a) domestic and (b) commercial spaces.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

We know that to achieve net zero, we must look at how we can accelerate the potential of all low carbon technologies including geothermal. The Government understands that geothermal can play a role in our decarbonisation ambitions particularly as a low carbon source for heat via heat networks. We have commissioned research into the potential costs of geothermal heat in the UK and will use this to understand how the government can support the sector to achieve its potential, in both the domestic and commercial sectors.

## ■ National Grid: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[8754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will meet National Grid to discuss potential underground cabling alternatives for the proposed Grimsby to Walpole pylon plans.

**Michael Shanks:**

The design and development of electricity transmission infrastructure is a matter for the developer, with the implications of those choices considered through the planning process. The government's position, as set out in National Policy Statement for electricity networks infrastructure (NPS EN-5), is that overhead lines should be the strong starting presumption for electricity networks developments in general, except in nationally designated landscapes where undergrounding is the starting presumption.

**Sir John Hayes:**[\[8759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the potential cost of including a package of community benefits in the proposal for the Grimsby to Walpole project under the Great Grid Upgrade.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Government cannot comment on specific projects which will come before the Secretary of State for a final planning decision. All projects, regardless of location, must go through the independent and robust planning process.

We are committed to ensuring that communities who live near new transmission infrastructure can see the benefits of it and are considering how to most effectively deliver this.

**■ Natural Gas and Oil: Investment****Tom Hayes:**[\[9029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate his Department has made of the investment by oil and gas operators in the UK's energy transition.

**Michael Shanks:**

We recognise that various oil and gas operators are part of integrated energy companies that invest across a range of technologies in the UK and elsewhere. The department does not measure or track investments in the energy transition made by private sector oil and gas companies operating in the UK Continental Shelf.

**■ Offshore Industry: North Sea****Tom Hayes:**[\[9027\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what proportion of North Sea operators invest solely in oil and gas extraction.

**Michael Shanks:**

We recognise that various oil and gas operators are part of integrated energy companies that invest across a range of technologies in the UK and elsewhere. The department does not measure or track investments in the energy transition made by private sector oil and gas companies operating in the UK Continental Shelf.

## ■ Warm Home Discount Scheme

**Sir Christopher Chope:**

[\[9118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what the cost to his Department is of the study by Winning Moves of experiences of the Warm Home Discount.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero have commissioned RSM UK Consulting in consortium with Winning Moves to evaluate the Warm Home Discount Scheme. Further information is available on:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Search>

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ Animal Welfare

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[8712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department had made of the potential merits of producing an animal protection strategy.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

This Government was elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans to improve animal welfare in a generation. We will be outlining more detail in due course.

### ■ Biodiversity

**Adrian Ramsay:**

[\[9572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the report by Wildlife and Countryside Link entitled Global Biodiversity Framework Tracker Report, published on 15 October 2024.

**Mary Creagh:**

We recognise the findings of the Global Biodiversity Framework Tracker Report and that more needs to be done on nature recovery.

Our submission to the CBD commits the UK to achieving each of the 23 global targets at home. They are underpinned by a set of specific commitments and policies to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity. By submitting our national targets on time, we have ensured the UK's commitments can be included in the global analysis to be carried out at COP16. We will publish the full UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in due course, detailing further delivery plans and future ambitions.

We set out our approach to implementing the Framework domestically in our Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). On 30 July, we announced a rapid review of the EIP to develop a new, statutory plan to protect and restore our natural environment, helping us meet each of our ambitious Environment Act targets. It will focus on cleaning up our waterways, reducing waste across the economy, planting millions more trees, improving air quality, and halting the decline in species by 2030.

### ■ **Biodiversity: Havering**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[8770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help tackle biodiversity loss in the London Borough of Havering.

**Mary Creagh:**

This Government is committed to tackling biodiversity loss. We have set targets on species abundance, species extinction and habitat creation and restoration through the Environment Act. These targets will drive actions to support biodiversity in Havering and every other local authority area across England.

Government has launched a rapid review of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) to ensure it fully supports our mission to recover nature. We will publish a summary of findings in early 2025, to be followed by publication of a revised EIP in Spring 2025.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are being prepared across the whole of England to support delivery of the biodiversity targets. The Greater London Authority is preparing a strategy which covers the Havering constituency, with support from the local planning authorities in the area, including Havering Borough Council.

### ■ **Bluebirds: Conservation**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[8769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of trends in the population of the bluebird species in England in the last 10 years.

**Mary Creagh:**

Bluebirds are native to North America and not the UK. As such we have made no assessment of the implications of our policies on populations of this group of species.

### ■ **Countryside: Access**

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[8954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a right of responsible access to the countryside.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Government recognises the importance of providing access to the outdoors for people's health and wellbeing and is working to ensure this is safe and appropriate. Our countryside and green spaces are a source of great national pride, but too many across the country are left without access to the great outdoors. That is why the last Labour Government expanded public access by introducing the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which provided the public a right of access to large areas of mountain, moor, heath, down, registered common land and coastal margin. 2024 marks 75 years since the pioneering post-war Labour Government passed the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which secured public access and preserved natural beauty.

This Government will continue to increase access to nature, boosting people's mental and physical health and leaving a legacy for generations to come. We will create nine new National River Walks, plant three new National Forests and empower communities to create new parks and green spaces in their communities with a new Community Right to Buy. We are considering our approach to improving access to nature and are committed to working with our stakeholders. We will provide a further update in due course.

**■ Fish Farming: Animal Welfare****Victoria Collins:**[\[8721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward species-specific legislative proposals to ensure farmed fish do not experience avoidable pain and suffering.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

I refer the hon. Member to the reply previously given to the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole, Vikki Slade, on 9 October 2024, [PQ UIN 7335](#).

**■ Fisheries****Fabian Hamilton:**[\[8631\]](#)

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

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Protecting and, where necessary, recovering our fish stocks is a priority for this Government, because fish is food and food security is national security. It is also committed to restoring and protecting nature at sea as well as on land. The Government is making progress delivering Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) which set out how to maintain or restore fish stocks to sustainable levels. The sixth Defra-led FMP was published on 10 October, with consultations launched on a further five draft FMPs too.

Through fisheries negotiations with our international partners, our objective is to set Total Allowable Catches in line with the best available scientific advice to ensure that



stocks are managed over the long term within sustainable limits. We are also introducing other fisheries management reforms domestically, including, for example, the introduction of Remote Electronic Monitoring, and action to reduce incidental bycatch in our fisheries.

## ■ Flood Control

**Dr Ben Spencer:**

[\[8675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to introduce flood performance certificates.

**Emma Hardy:**

Protecting communities from flooding is a key priority for this Government.

Flood Re is a UK-wide, Government and industry led flood re-insurance scheme which aims to promote the affordability and availability of insurance for UK households at high flood risk. It is also required to manage the transition to risk-reflective pricing of flood insurance for household premises, ahead of the scheme closure in 2039.

In their 2023 Transition Plan, Flood Re have committed to bring to the market a 'Flood Performance Certificate' which will enable assessments to be undertaken of property-level resilience to flooding.

Whilst there is no statutory requirement for ministers to comment or respond to the published transition plans, the Government continues to work closely with Flood Re on the transition to risk reflective pricing for household insurance.

**Dr Ben Spencer:**

[\[8678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Environment Agency's (a) actions and (b) policies in managing flood risk from watercourse in riparian ownership.

**Emma Hardy:**

Under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Environment Agency (EA) has a strategic overview of the management of all sources of flooding and coastal change and are the lead authority for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, estuaries and the sea.

Landowners are responsible, under common law, for maintaining the bed and banks of any watercourses that run through their land in a state which avoids flooding on their neighbours' or other land. This common law duty also extends to keeping watercourses and culverts clear of anything that could cause an obstruction, either on their own land or downstream if it is washed away.

The EA has published guidance on owning a watercourse on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), and has supplemented their riparian guidance with [Your Watercourse: rights and roles](#) to help Risk Management Authorities, EA staff, and landowners have more effective conversations on this matter.

**Dr Ben Spencer:**

**[8679]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many enforcement actions relating to flood risk prevention were taken by the Environment Agency in each constituency in 2023.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Environment Agency (EA) regulate works in rivers through a permissions-based approach under the Environmental Permitting Regulations. These are referred to as “flood risk activities”. The primary purpose of the regulations is to ensure in-river works do not damage the environment or cause a flood risk to others.

Enforcement actions can occur due to a breach in permit condition but are predominantly for unauthorised works. Enforcement actions can vary from advice and guidance, formal warnings, notices, civil sanctions and prosecutions.

There were 65 Enforcement Actions across the country relating to flood risk prevention in 2023. Please see the table below for the number of enforcement actions for each EA area.

**Number of enforcement actions for each Environment Agency area**

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY AREA	NUMBER OF ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS
Cumbria and Lancashire	0
Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2
East Anglia	30
East Midlands	0
Greater Manchester and Merseyside	0
Hertfordshire and North London	0
Kent, South London and East Sussex	2
Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire	0
North East	0
Solent and South Downs	0
Thames	0
West Midlands	1
Wessex	0
Yorkshire	30

**Patrick Spencer:**

[9553]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will have discussions with the Environment Agency on clarifying its position relating to the ability of landowners to maintain stretches of waterway on their land to help reduce flooding.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Environment Agency has proactively engaged riparian landowners setting out responsibilities, where there might be exemptions and how they can get help. This has already reached several communities affected in Storm Babet – in Central Suffolk and North Ipswich constituency the letter has been sent to:

1. Framlingham
2. Debenham
3. Needham Market
4. Wickham Market
5. Charsfield
6. Parham
7. Framsdon
8. Hacheston
9. Somersham
10. Great Bealings

**Patrick Spencer:**

[9554]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to support for landowners to maintain stretches of waterways on their land to help mitigate future flooding risk.

**Emma Hardy:**

All farmers and land managers are encouraged to manage the land in a way that supports and enhances the environment while reducing impacts on others, such as climate risks.

Where there is a watercourse, riparian landowners are required under common law to keep watercourses clear of anything which could cause an obstruction to the flow of water on their land, or downstream if washed away. This includes maintenance of the bed and banks, as well as any trees or shrubs growing on the banks. They must also ensure that any structures such as culverts, trash screens and mill gates are cleared of debris and allow the flow of water.

The new Environmental Land Management schemes aim to help the environment while supporting farming and food production. These will include support for farmers and land managers to adopt Natural Flood Management approaches in a way that reduces flooding and coastal erosion risks to local communities.

**■ Flood Control: Central Suffolk and North Ipswich****Patrick Spencer:**[\[9551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing levels of funding to help (a) support residents who experienced flooding during Storm Babet in 2023 and (b) mitigate against the risk of flooding in Central Suffolk and North Ipswich constituency.

**Emma Hardy:**

Following Storm Babet, the Flood Recovery Framework was activated by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Alongside this, the Property Flood Resilience Grant Scheme was activated by Defra.

A post activation review of the Flood Recovery Framework is underway and we expect this to report later this year.

Protecting communities from flooding is a key priority for this Government. The Government is determined to turbocharge the delivery and repair of flood defences, improve drainage systems and develop natural flood management schemes. We are investing over £1.25 billion this year to scale up national resilience through building new and improving existing flood defences. In the current floods investment programme, there are over 150 property flood resilience schemes planned, which will better protect over 4,000 homes.

The Government is reviewing the investment programme to get it back on track after the pace slowed due to the impacts of inflation and delays with the supply chain.

Decisions on future spending will be made at the spending review later this month.

**Patrick Spencer:**[\[9552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support flood defence and preparedness works in Central Suffolk and North Ipswich.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Environment Agency (EA) serves as a Category 1 responder, offering flood warning services and managing various flood management projects. Post-2023 floods, Suffolk's flood warning areas were refined for enhanced accuracy, with changes effective from November. The EA partners with local groups to boost community resilience and planning.

Hydraulic modelling studies by the EA, due for completion in Spring/Summer 2025, will ensure maintenance activities remain suitable for Framlingham, Wickham Market, Debenham, and Needham Market. Needham Market's ongoing Property Flood Resilience (PFR) projects involve 24 properties, with installations set for January 2025, and 43 additional properties surveyed in October 2024 for winter 2025 installations.

Feasibility studies for flood risk interventions in Framlingham and Wickham Market will start in Spring 2025. The Alde & Ore flood risk model updates are planned for FY

27/28, pending funding. Suffolk County Council oversees a £5,000 Flood Recovery Framework grant, with 127 applications received and 39 fully paid. The EA operates Rattlesdon and Gipping reservoirs, aiding downstream communities, and continues to engage with landowners for Natural Flood Management opportunities.

### ■ **Flood Control: Huntingdon**

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[9257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6809 on Flood Control: Huntingdon, which settlements are covered by the 12 Flood Liaison Action Groups.

**Emma Hardy:**

There are 10 active and well-established flood action groups across the Huntingdon constituency. These are Alconbury, Alconbury Weston, Broughton, Buckden, Godmanchester, Houghton & Wyton, Kimbolton & Stonely, Offord (Cluny/D'Arcy), St Ives and Wistow.

All of these communities have flood plans in place and access to flood kit. In Alconbury and Alconbury Weston, the Environment Agency (EA) have also installed flood monitoring cameras which the local flood action group in the community can access and use for monitoring purposes during a flood event.

Following the recent flooding event, Brampton and Hemingford Grey have also sought support to set up local flood actions groups. The EA are now in the process of working with Cambridgeshire County Council (the Lead Local Flood Authority) to help support and develop these new flood groups.

### ■ **Grasslands: Dartmoor**

**Steve Race:**

[\[9030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the Government response to the Independent review of protected site management on Dartmoor, what his planned timescale is for (a) agreeing, (b) implementing and (c) completing a Molinia reduction strategy across the moor; what level of Molinia reduction he plans to secure; and who the senior responsible officer for the Molinia reduction strategy will be.

**Mary Creagh:**

We fully support the recommendations of the independent review, which includes the recommendation to tackle the over domination of Molinia in some places on Dartmoor. Defra is supporting the establishment of the Land Use Management Group (LUMG) in the coming weeks. The LUMG will oversee the broader plan for restoring Dartmoor's SSSIs, including the management of Molinia to benefit biodiversity, carbon and farming interests. The reduction of Molinia will require a strategic approach across large areas of Dartmoor and it will take time.

**■ Horses: Dartmoor****Steve Race:****[8913]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to the Independent review of protected site management on Dartmoor, published on 12 December 2023, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the design of the (a) Sustainable Farming Incentive and (b) Countryside Stewardship scheme will facilitate retention of the number of semi-wild hill ponies on Dartmoor.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Our new moorland offer includes actions in the Sustainable Farming Incentive, available now, and new and amended actions to be included in Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier. We will confirm next steps in the rollout of Countryside Stewardship in due course.

Through the new offer, we provide payment for grazing with both cattle and ponies and both cattle and ponies are eligible under the native breeds at risk supplement. We are thereby removing the competition between the two as recommended in the Dartmoor review. We have also made clear within the new offer that ponies are exempt from stock removal requirements, in recognition that removal of ponies from moorland is neither feasible nor desirable in most circumstances.

We cannot, exclude either cattle or ponies from stocking density calculations. All livestock contribute to the overall grazing pressure exerted on moorland. On some moorland habitats (such as peatland), it is necessary to graze with low stocking densities to support habitat restoration and maintenance. If any livestock are excluded from the stocking density calculation, over grazing would result. This would prevent us achieving desired improvements in habitat condition.

The moorland offer will be subject to monitoring and evaluation. Any change in the pony population during this time will be investigated and further mitigations will be explored if necessary.

**■ Internal Drainage Boards: Finance****Dr Roz Savage:****[9015]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he plans to take to reform funding arrangements for Internal Drainage Board levies.

**Emma Hardy:**

Defra has committed to work with the internal drainage board (IDB) sector and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to review IDBs' current funding and costs. This will include examination of whether any changes are needed to their funding model.

IDBs are local independent statutory public bodies, mainly funded by the beneficiaries of their work. This includes farmers who pay drainage rates and local authorities that pay special levies. Those beneficiaries are represented on the boards

of IDBs, where decisions are made on the forthcoming programme of work and the annual drainage rates and special levies.

## ■ **Pets: Animal Housing**

**Tim Farron:**

[\[8786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many (a) dog and (b) cat places were licensed by the Animal and Plant Health Agency for quarantine in each year since 2014.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Animal and Plant Health Agency only holds information on the number of quarantine kennels (QKs) that have been approved from 2017. The table below details the number of approved premises for each year:

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of QKs approved - dogs	9	9	7	7	7	7	7	6
Number of QKs approved - cats	9	9	7	6	6	6	6	5

The numbers provided only cover quarantine kennels that are for public use as pet quarantine kennels. We have not included rabies quarantine facilities which includes zoo quarantine premises, research quarantine premises and 48 hours temporary holdings at ports/airports.

## ■ **Pets: Animal Welfare and Smuggling**

**Mr Louie French:**

[\[9009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to tackle (a) puppy and kitten smuggling and (b) ear cropping of dogs.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

This Government was elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans to improve animal welfare in a generation. As outlined in our manifesto we will end puppy smuggling.

Ear cropping has rightly been banned in the UK for over 15 years. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is an offence in England and Wales to carry out a non-exempted mutilation e.g., where a surgical procedure is not carried out for medical purposes, such as the cropping of a dog's ears. While the practice is illegal in the UK, we

recognise that the current legislative framework can be abused by traders who import these dogs from abroad.

We are considering the most effective ways to deliver our commitments and will be setting out next steps in due course.

## ■ **Pets: Insecticides**

**David Chadwick:**

[\[9011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the use of (a) Fipronil and (b) Imidacloprid in flea treatments for pets on the (i) water courses and aquatic ecosystems and (ii) the environment.

**Emma Hardy:**

In the UK, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) authorises veterinary medicinal products under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 (as amended), with the aim of protecting public health, animal health, the environment, and to promote animal welfare. The VMD carefully balances the benefits of these medicines, including protection of companion animals and humans from parasitic and zoonotic diseases, against potential risks, including environmental impacts, and only authorises products if the benefits outweigh the risks.

We are aware of concerns about flea and tick treatments, particularly fipronil and imidacloprid, contributing to pollution in UK surface waters. Addressing this is a priority, and we have established the cross-government Pharmaceuticals in the Environment Group to develop strategies to reduce the environmental impact, focusing on reducing the exposure of these substances to watercourses.

## ■ **Recycling**

**Jess Asato:**

[\[6935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to promote a circular economy.

**Mary Creagh:**

To enable delivery of a Circular Economy Strategy for England, the Secretary of State has asked his department to convene a taskforce of experts from industry, academia, civil society, and the civil service.

## ■ **River Avon: Public Footpaths**

**Sir Christopher Chope:**

[\[9119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress the Environment Agency and Natural England have made on facilitating reinstatement of the Avon Valley footpath between Christchurch and Burton.



**Mary Creagh:**

The closure of the footpath in this location is because there are breaches in the banks of the Hampshire Avon along Winkton Common upstream of Christchurch. These breaches have worsened over the last 6 months because of the exceptionally high-water levels in the river.

The Environment Agency (EA) is working with the Meyrick Estate, South West Water (SWW), Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) and Natural England (NE) to understand and mitigate the long-term implications. We are jointly exploring potentially significant environmental benefits in the form of new wetland habitat, but there are a number of important considerations, such as assets owned by SWW which run across the common.

While the EA is neither responsible nor funded to maintain the banks of the river in this location, we are supporting Natural England in their work with the Meyrick Estate to identify a long-term alternative route for the footpath. NE have worked with the Meyrick Estate on a Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier application which will include a review of public access in this area and aim to identify a new sustainable route for the footpath.

We recognise that the situation is frustrating for those who want to access the Avon Valley footpath, but changes in river levels associated with climate change do mean that the historic route is likely to be unsustainable.

**■ Rivers: Tree Planting****Alex Mayer:**[\[8714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help increase tree planting along riverbanks.

**Alex Mayer:**[\[8715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he is taking steps to use the Government's tree planting programme to help tackle (a) flooding and (b) upper catchment management of rivers.

**Mary Creagh:**

Defra recognises the role tree planting has to support the management of England's rivers. Defra works with the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Environment Agency to ensure tree planting is appropriately targeted. Defra supports a number of projects and grants in this area. These include:

- The England Woodland Creation Offer supports riparian tree planting, flood management and improved water quality;
- The Woodlands for Water project works with the Riverscapes Partnership to facilitate the creation of riparian woodland corridors in six river catchment areas;
- The Environment Agency's Water Environment Improvement Fund supports the planting of thousands of riparian trees across England;

- The introduction of a Sustainable Farming Incentive action for the management of habitat strips next to watercourses to support the planting of trees and scrub for biodiversity, flooding and water quality benefits.

### ■ Sewage: Water Treatment

**Dr Ben Spencer:** [\[9229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) adequacy of improvements to Chertsey Sewage Works and (b) extent of further work needed to reduce storm overflows from that site.

**Emma Hardy:**

The Environment Agency (EA) has required Thames Water to significantly improve the storm tank capacity at Chertsey Sewage Treatment works as part of the current Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) 2020-25 to reduce the frequency of storm overflows.

The current completion date for this work is 31 December 2024. The EA will be inspecting the site to confirm the improvement scheme has been completed and will issue an updated environmental permit accordingly.

### ■ Shellfish

**Jayne Kirkham:** [\[9372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 7677 on Shellfish, what his planned timeline is for making this decision.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra is currently reviewing Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA's) proposal to increase the minimum landing size of native oysters under the Fal Fishery Order 2016. A decision will be made once the review is complete.

### ■ Shellfish: Sales

**Alex Mayer:** [\[8709\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to end the sale of live decapod crustaceans.

**Alex Mayer:** [\[8710\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish best practice guidance for the transport of live decapod crustaceans.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government is committed to an evidence-based approach to improve welfare standards for decapod crustaceans and cephalopod molluscs. My department is continuing to engage with stakeholders and seeking to address evidence gaps to inform future policy decisions in this area.

Animal welfare legislation protects all animals from being transported in a way likely to cause injury or suffering. Live decapod crustaceans are protected from injury or unnecessary suffering during transportation by a general duty of care provision in Article 4 of The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006 (WATEO) and equivalent national legislation in Scotland and Wales.

There are no plans to publish best practice guidance for the transport of live decapod crustaceans.

## ■ Textiles: Recycling

**Afzal Khan:**

[\[8853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to provide financial incentives for businesses engaged in (a) upcycling and (b) the sustainable production of textiles.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Secretary of State has asked his department to convene a taskforce of experts from across the 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, including financial incentives, may need to be made in the textiles sector as it helps to develop the Circular Economy Strategy.

Financial incentives are primarily a matter for the Treasury, and Treasury Ministers will be part of a Small Ministerial Group on the Circular Economy, which is also being convened, along with Ministers from Defra, the Department for Business and Trade, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Department for Transport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This group will govern, join up and drive work to promote a Circular Economy across the Government, supporting the Government's Missions to kickstart economic growth and make Britain a clean energy superpower.

**Gareth Bacon:**

[\[8894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to introduce an extended producer responsibility scheme for the textile sector.

**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.

### ■ Tree Planting

**Alex Mayer:** [\[8920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on its commitment to launch a four-country tree planting task force.

**Mary Creagh:**

Defra has been engaging with the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive on the establishment of a Tree Planting Taskforce.

### ■ Wind Power: Planning Permission

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch:** [\[7825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department was consulted prior to the publication of the revised planning policy on onshore wind.

**Mary Creagh:**

The planning policy on onshore wind was announced pre-election. It was supported by the voting public and has our full support.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Alexei Navalny

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[9132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will raise the treatment of Alexei Navalny by the Russian authorities at the United Nations.

**Stephen Doughty:**

Alexei Navalny's courage and aspiration for a democratic Russia live on in those brave Russians who continue to speak up. The Government continues to call on the Russian authorities to allow a full and independent investigation into the circumstances of his death. At the UN Security Council on 24 September, the Foreign Secretary condemned Russia's repression of its own people, including courageous individuals such as Alexei Navalny. That day the UK's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva also raised Alexei Navalny's death and the treatment of political prisoners in Russia at the Human Rights Council.

## ■ Bangladesh: Human Rights

**Clive Lewis:** [\[8833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help uphold human rights in Bangladesh.

**Clive Lewis:** [\[8834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help promote stability in Bangladesh.

**Catherine West:**

The UK has a long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. The Interim Government in Bangladesh has the UK Government's full support as it works to provide stability and promote human rights in Bangladesh. We encourage the work of the United Nations as it conducts an impartial and independent fact-finding mission to identify human rights violations. The UK Government is providing up to £27 million from March 2023 to February 2028 under the Bangladesh Collaborative, Accountable and Peaceful Politics programme for protecting civic and political space, fostering collaboration, reducing corruption and mitigating tensions that lead to violence.

## ■ British Nationals Abroad: Detainees

**Tim Roca:** [\[9364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 8070 on Unlawfully detained British nationals abroad, in how many cases his Department has the consent of individuals to raise welfare or human rights concerns.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Where the FCDO has welfare or human rights concerns in relation to British nationals detained overseas, consular staff seek the consent of individuals before raising concerns with the relevant authorities. The FCDO does not hold statistics on the number of British nationals who have provided the FCDO with their consent to raise welfare or human rights concerns.

## ■ China: British Nationals Abroad

**Chris Law:** [\[8831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to monitor China's compliance with international consular conventions on the treatment of naturalised British citizens with (a) Hong Kong and (b) Chinese descent.

**Catherine West:**

The FCDO's Travel Advice for China explains that China does not recognise dual nationality and anyone born in China to a Chinese national parent would be considered by the Chinese authorities to be of Chinese nationality and treated as a

Chinese citizen. China therefore does not grant us consular access to these individuals, preventing our ability to directly monitor China's compliance with relevant conventions in these circumstances.

## ■ Detainees

**Tim Roca:** [\[8374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will appoint a special envoy for arbitrarily detained persons.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Providing consular support to British nationals abroad, particularly in cases involving arbitrary detention, is a vital public service and one of the FCDO's top priorities. The Government is reviewing how to strengthen that support, including by considering the appointment of a new envoy.

## ■ Gaza: Israel

**Laurence Turner:** [\[7146\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential implications for its policies of the (a) findings and (b) recommendations of the report entitled Detention in the context of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza (October 2023-June 2024), published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 31 July 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

As the Foreign Secretary outlined in his statement to the House of Commons on 2 September, the UK's concern about the treatment of detainees was one of the factors determining the UK's decision to suspend certain arms export licences to Israel that could be used in the conflict in Gaza. We have read the recommendations produced by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We urge Israel to reinstate immediate and unfettered access for the International Committee of the Red Cross into detention centres as required by international law. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary continue to press Israeli leaders on the importance of upholding International Humanitarian Law. We want to see an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the protection of all civilians, much more aid entering Gaza and a path to long-term peace and stability.

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[8320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of the conflict in Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Following a review of Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law, we took decisive action on 2 September, suspending all the export licences that we assess might be used by the Israeli Defense Forces for military operations in Gaza: around 30 licences. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, and I have raised issues

of International Humanitarian Law compliance on several occasions with the Israeli government. With mounting civilian casualties and hundreds of thousands of displaced people, all parties must do everything possible to protect civilians and fully respect International Humanitarian Law. We continue to urge Israel to fulfil its promise to flood Gaza with aid, and to permit immediate and unfettered access for the International Committee of the Red Cross to detention centres. Ministers will continue to raise these issues due with urgency with the Israeli Government.

## ■ Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office

**Neil Coyle:**

[\[9466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 8157 on Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of removing consular status from the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in the context of Hong Kong no longer being an independent territory.

**Catherine West:**

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office Act 1996 provides the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office with certain privileges and immunities in line with the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations for the purposes of furthering economic and trade interests. There are no current plans to replace this legislation.

## ■ Israel: Lebanon

**Abtisam Mohamed:**

[\[8321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to make an assessment of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of the conflict in Lebanon.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Following the 2 September suspension, there are currently no existing UK arms licences to Israel for use in Lebanon, apart from exempt F35 components, so there is no legal requirement to assess IHL compliance. This Government is clear that International Humanitarian Law must be upheld, and civilians protected. 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. Exports to the F-35 programme are exempted from this suspension. This is due to the F-35 programme's broader strategic role in NATO and wider implications for international peace and security. This exemption should not in principle apply to licences for F-35 components which could be identified as going to Israel.

## ■ Myanmar: Foreign Relations

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[7765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the situation in Myanmar.

**Catherine West:**

This government will continue to support the Myanmar people and their aspirations for a free and democratic future. The UK will continue to use its role as penholder at the UN Security Council to maintain an international spotlight on Myanmar. We will continue to support ASEAN's leadership on the crisis, including the full implementation of the Five Point Consensus and the work of the Special Envoy. This government will continue to use targeted sanctions, to constrain the military's access to finance, arms and equipment. Since the coup, the UK has provided more than £150 million in life-saving humanitarian assistance, emergency healthcare and education support, and work to support civil society and local communities.

## ■ Myanmar: Human Rights

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[7766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help tackle the human rights situation in Myanmar.

**Catherine West:**

The UK condemns human rights abuses by the Myanmar military regime and is clear that there must be accountability for atrocities committed. The UK has provided £800,000 to the Independent Mechanism for Myanmar and established the Myanmar Witness programme to gather and preserve evidence of human rights violations in support of future prosecutions. In April, we co-sponsored a UN Human Rights Council resolution on Myanmar which stressed the need to address the root causes of human rights violations and abuses against ethnic and religious minority groups.

## ■ Myanmar: Humanitarian Aid

**Dame Harriett Baldwin:** [\[8443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Myanmar.

**Catherine West:**

Since the coup in February 2021, the UK has provided more than £150 million for life-saving humanitarian assistance, healthcare, education and support for civil society and local communities in Myanmar. Since September 2022, UK funding has provided over 560,000 people in conflict-affected areas with essential humanitarian support, including safe water and sanitation. Most recently, the UK Government provided £1.3 million to help address the impact of the severe flooding in September.



**■ Nadia Ayoub McCulloch****Fabian Hamilton:**[\[8106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department are taking to help reunite Nadia Ayoub McCulloch with her family.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The FCDO are aware of Nadia Ayoub McCulloch's situation and have been in contact with her directly. The FCDO's Consular team have been providing, and continue to provide, support to Nadia at what we recognise will be a distressing time for her, her family and her friends.

**■ St Lucia: Passports****Mark Garnier:**[\[8132\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what reports his Department has received on the alleged misappropriation of funds through the sale of passports to foreign investors by members of the St Lucian government; and whether he plans to make representations to his counterpart in St Lucia on this matter.

**Catherine West:**

We are aware of the risks associated with Citizenship by Investment (CBI) programmes as described in this question. They are a source of much needed development finance for several countries, but they can also pose challenges for both the host and third-party nations. As a result, the UK maintains ongoing dialogue with various stakeholders to address issues related to CBI and Ministers will seek to raise with their counterparts at events such as CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) and in dialogues in London.

**■ Tibet: Human Rights****Jim Shannon:**[\[9175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to help tackle (a) forced disappearances, (b) the prolonged detentions of monks and nuns and (c) other suppression of (i) freedom of religion or belief and (ii) human rights in Tibet.

**Catherine West:**

This Government will stand firm on human rights, including China's repression of the people of Tibet. We will champion freedom of religion or belief for all abroad, and work to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora, and through bilateral engagement.

The Foreign Secretary raised human rights in his first meeting with China's Director of Foreign Affairs Commission Office and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, on 26 July.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE****■ Audiology: Children****James Wild:****[9230]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase access to (a) Auditory Verbal therapy for deaf children whose families want them to learn to listen and speak and (b) other early and effective support to develop language and communication for deaf children.

**James Wild:****[9231]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure adequate numbers of (a) auditory verbal therapists and (b) other specialist workers for babies, children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

NHS Audiology services, including support for non-hearing children, are locally commissioned, and the responsibility for meeting the needs of non-hearing children lies with local National Health Service commissioners.

NHS England is supporting the integrated care boards (ICBs) to make informed decisions about the provision of audiology services so that they can provide consistent, high quality, and integrated care to non-hearing children. In 2019, NHS England, with input from the National Deaf Children's Society, produced a guide for commissioners and health and local authority providers which supports non-hearing children and young people, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/what-works-chswg-guide.pdf>

The Department recognises the need to improve access to therapies generally. Since September 2020, all eligible allied health profession students have received a non-repayable training grant of a minimum of £5,000 per academic year. NHS England and the Department for Education are also working in partnership to co-fund £10 million for nine Early Language Support for Every Child pathfinder sites over two years, starting from September 2023, to provide early identification, targeted, and universal support for children with speech, language, and communication needs in both early years and primary school settings, and more timely referrals for specialist support if required.

NHS England met with Auditory Verbal UK (AVUK) last year and discussed the need for more higher-level research evidence for the intervention and to develop evaluations of impact. AVUK was also invited to join the Chief Scientific Officer's Audiology stakeholder group.

## ■ Brain: Tumours

**David Simmonds:**

[\[9021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding his Department has allocated to (a) public bodies and (b) agencies to run campaigns aimed at encouraging brain tumour patients to participate in clinical trials.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department awards funding to encourage participation of brain tumour patients in clinical trials through the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR), the Department's research delivery arm. Funding is awarded through open competition, and researchers are expected to include a robust plan for patient and public involvement as part of their application.

Between 2018/19 and 2022/2, the NIHR has invested £11.3 million directly in brain tumour research, as well as investing £31.5 million in research infrastructure, including facilities, services, and the research workforce, allowing research funding to be leveraged from other donors and organisations. This funding has allowed 227 brain cancer research studies to be carried out and enabled 8,500 people to participate in potentially life-changing research into brain cancer within the National Health Service.

In addition, the NIHR provides an online service called Be Part of Research which promotes participation in health and social care research by allowing users to search for relevant studies and register their interest. This makes it easier for people to find and take part in health and care research that is relevant to them, such as brain cancer.

In September 2024, the NIHR announced a new approach to transform the outcomes for patients who are living with brain tumours and their families, ultimately reducing the lives lost to cancer, with a new national Brain Tumour Research Consortium, a new research funding call, and a new Tessa Jowell Allied Health Professional research fellowship.

## ■ Breast Cancer: Screening

**Sarah Owen:**

[\[8880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans increase breast screenings for young women with (a) neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1) and (b) other determinants of being at risk of developing breast cancer.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

All women with neurofibromatosis type 1 are eligible to begin screening at the age of 40 years old. This is 10 years below the normal screening age of 50 years old. Women can have screenings from a younger age if they have a higher-than-average risk of breast cancer, for example due to family history or an inherited gene such as BRCA.

**Ms Julie Minns:** [\[9259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many breast screening centres in England are (a) static sites and (b) mobile units.

**Ms Julie Minns:** [\[9260\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many static breast screening centres have wheelchair accessible mammogram machines.

**Ms Julie Minns:** [\[9261\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many mobile breast screening units have wheelchair accessible mammogram machines.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

NHS England does not centrally hold the numbers of static and mobile screening units, or those that have wheelchair accessible X-ray machines. However, NHS England is fully committed to modernising the breast screening programme and removing barriers to accessing screening.

## ■ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Long Covid: Research

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson:** [\[8115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to leverage international cooperation to accelerate (a) biomedical research and (b) treatments for (i) ME and (ii) long covid.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is exploring opportunities with international research partners to foster research cooperation in areas of unmet need. For example, the Department of Health and Social Care has close links with the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Long COVID Research and Practice. The US' Assistant Secretary for Health has discussed long COVID with the Chief Medical Officer, and the Department of Health and Social Care has also co-hosted a series of researcher exchanges between United Kingdom and US experts.

The NIHR and Medical Research Council are committed to funding high-quality research to understand the causes, consequences, and treatment of long COVID and myalgic encephalomyelitis, also known as chronic fatigue syndrome, and are actively exploring next steps for research in these areas.

## ■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

**Sir Christopher Chope:** [\[9410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 8098 on Coronavirus: Vaccination, whether any line extensions to Covid-19 vaccinations have been authorised to tackle reported adverse side effects.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The most common side effects observed with COVID-19 vaccines are pain and swelling at the injection site, tiredness, headaches, muscle and joint pain, chills, fever, and diarrhoea. These side effects are similar to those seen with other vaccines and are usually mild or moderate, and get better within a few days after vaccination. A full list of side effects is presented in the Patient Information Leaflet for each vaccine. Modifications or line extensions to the original vaccines, specifically to reduce these side effects, have not been introduced.

**■ Darent Valley Hospital: Admissions****Jim Dickson:**[\[9101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of pollution on the number of admissions to Darent Valley Hospital.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Exposure to air pollution is associated with increased hospital admissions, particularly for respiratory and cardiovascular conditions. The UK Health Security Agency has not calculated the potential impact of air pollution on the number of admissions to the Darent Valley Hospital specifically.

**■ Epilepsy: Cannabis****Mr Paul Foster:**[\[9248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has undertaken recent research on the use of medical cannabis for the treatment of (a) Dravet and (b) Lennox-Gastaut syndrome.

**Mr Paul Foster:**[\[9249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has undertaken recent research on the use of medical cannabis for the treatment of epilepsy.

**Mr Paul Foster:**[\[9250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will hold discussions with the Lancashire Teaching Hospital Trust on the potential merits of enabling clinicians to prescribe unlicensed cannabis products to children for clinical reasons.

**Mr Paul Foster:**[\[9251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will undertake a review of NHS policy on the assessment of individual funding requests to support children for whom prescribing medical cannabis could help prevent repeated admissions to hospital.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has published technology appraisals recommending Epidyolex, a licensed form of cannabidiol extracted from cannabis, for the treatment of seizures associated with two rare forms

of epilepsies, specifically Dravet syndrome and Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, and tuberous sclerosis complex.

Deciding whether to prescribe an unlicensed cannabis-based medicine, a medicine that has not been assessed or approved by the medicines regulator, is a clinical decision, and the funding of medicines within the National Health Service is governed by well-established processes and evidence-based guidelines produced by the NICE. The NICE found that there is insufficient evidence of safety and effectiveness to support a population-wide recommendation in relation to unlicensed cannabis-based medicines for severe treatment-resistant epilepsy. The NICE also calls for further research.

Following the publication of the NICE's guidance, NHS England and The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) has agreed funding for two trials relating to the use of cannabis-based medicines for the treatment of difficult-to-treat epilepsies. These will be world-first trials and will be crucial in informing future NHS funding decisions. Due to commercial confidentiality, further information on the trials cannot be released at this time.

Where a treatment is not currently routinely funded by the NHS in England, an NHS clinician can, on behalf of their patient, make an application for funding in exceptional clinical circumstances. This is known as an Individual Funding Request (IFR). In making an application for an IFR, clinicians must demonstrate that the patient in question is clinically exceptional compared to the wider group of patients with the same condition, and is likely to derive greater benefit from the treatment. Each case is assessed on an individual basis, and is not a process the Government can seek to influence.

Until the evidence base improves, prescribers will remain reticent in prescribing, and no decision can be made by the NHS on routine funding. That is why the Government is committed to research and catalysing the generation of evidence to support use of these products.

Like any other area of medicine, manufacturers of these products must invest in research and clinical trials to ensure that cannabis-based medicines are proven both safe and effective before they can be considered for routine funding by the NHS. The NIHR remains open to receiving good quality proposals for research in this area as a priority, and stands ready to support researchers and manufacturers to develop applications.

## ■ Food: Labelling

**Richard Foord:**

**[9103]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of calorie labelling on menus on (a) obesity, (b) the prevalence of eating disorders and (c) other issues.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Legislation requiring large businesses in England, those with 250 or more employees, to display calorie information on non-prepacked food and soft drinks came into force in 2022. It aims to support consumers to make healthier choices for themselves and their families when eating out or getting a takeaway, with clear information about the calorie content of potential purchases. It may also encourage businesses to reformulate and provide lower calorie options, helping to create a healthier food environment.

The published impact assessment estimated that by lowering calorie consumption amongst people living with overweight or obesity, the policy would produce National Health Service savings of £430 million and social care savings of £477 million over 25 years.

We continue to evaluate the impact of the Out of Home Calorie Labelling Regulations, including on people living with eating disorders. We will publish a post-implementation review within five years of implementation which will consider the effectiveness of the policy.

**■ Heart Diseases: Research****Andrew Rosindell:****[5896]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support research on (a) the causes of and (b) treatments for atrial septal defect.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Government, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), is committed to funding high quality, timely research that leads to improved outcomes for patients and the public, and which makes the health and social care system more efficient, effective, and safe. Research evidence is vital for improving treatments and outcomes for people, including people with conditions related to congenital heart disease.

The Department is proud to invest £1.5 billion per year on health research through the NIHR. Over the past five financial years, from 2019/20 to 2023/24, the NIHR has invested an estimated £1.8 million on congenital heart disease, including atrial septal defect, via its research programmes. Recent examples of congenital heart disease projects funded in this way include a three-year study to assess how the use of artificial intelligence technology can detect heart conditions in babies before birth, and a five-year study to improve how the quality of congenital heart services is measured and reported in England, with further information on both studies available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://fundingawards.nihr.ac.uk/award/NIHR301448>

<https://fundingawards.nihr.ac.uk/award/PR-R20-0318-23001>

The Department, via NIHR, also funds infrastructure that provides clinical expertise, specialist facilities, the workforce, and support services to support research across a

range of clinical areas, including congenital heart disease. The NIHR welcomes high quality funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including congenital heart disease.

### ■ Hepatitis: Screening

**Steve Race:** [8687]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to continue the Hepatitis C opt-out testing programme beyond March 2025.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Opt-out testing in emergency departments for bloodborne viruses, including hepatitis C, is live at 34 sites in areas of extremely high prevalence of HIV, and is expanding to areas of high prevalence of HIV. A further 47 emergency department sites will be funded for a 12-month period across the financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26.

On 9 November 2023, the UK Health Security Agency published a report evaluating the first 12 months of the NHS England funded emergency department opt-out testing programme for bloodborne viruses. The initiative has so far been successful, with 499 people being diagnosed with hepatitis C in the first year of the testing. Further information on this programme is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bloodborne-viruses-opt-out-testing-in-emergency-departments>

### ■ Hospices: Children

**Shaun Davies:** [8935]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to continue the provision of the Children's Hospice Grant into 2025/26.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

In 2024/2025, NHS England provided £25 million in funding for children and young people's hospices. This funding was distributed, for the first time, via integrated care boards, in line with National Health Service devolution.

I recently met NHS England, Together for Short Lives, and one of the chairs of the Children Who Need Palliative Care All Party Parliamentary Group to discuss children's palliative and end of life care, and this funding stream was discussed at length at that meeting. NHS England is currently considering the future of this important funding stream beyond 2024/25.

### ■ Maternal Mortality: Ethnic Groups

**Victoria Collins:** [8723]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help tackle inequalities in maternal mortality rates for (a) Black women and (b) women from ethnic minority backgrounds.



**Karin Smyth:**

It is unacceptable that there are such stark inequalities in maternal outcomes. The Government is committed to closing the black and Asian maternal mortality gap. We are urgently considering the immediate action needed to tackle inequalities for women and babies in maternity care, including what targets are needed.

A key objective in NHS England's three-year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services, which we are currently supporting them in delivering, is to reduce inequalities for all in maternity access, experience, and outcomes, and to improve equity for mothers and babies. As part of that, all Local Maternity and Neonatal Systems have published Equity and Equality actions plans to tackle inequalities for women and babies from ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas, tailored to the needs of the local area.

**Maternity Services: Standards****Deirdre Costigan:**[\[8276\]](#)

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

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government recognises the significant issues within maternity services. We are determined to ensure all women and babies receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care.

We are committed to providing support to trusts failing on maternity care, which includes tailored support for those trusts to make rapid improvements using hands-on intensive support through the Maternity Safety Support Programme.

We are working to address workforce issues, including committing to recruit thousands of new midwives. NHS England is boosting the midwifery workforce through undergraduate training, apprenticeships, postgraduate conversion, return to midwifery programmes, and international recruitment.

We are continuing to work with the National Health Service as it delivers its three-year maternity and neonatal plan to grow our maternity workforce, develop a culture of safety, and ensure all women, babies and families receive more equitable care.

**Midwives: Flexible Working****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[8870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the availability of flexible working arrangements for NHS midwives.

**Karin Smyth:**

All employees covered by the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook have the right to request flexible working from day one, without the need to provide a justification.

NHS England is committed to promoting and supporting flexible working opportunities in midwifery, and across the wider National Health Service workforce. They have brought together midwifery leaders from across the system to support the implementation of flexible working across maternity services. There are no plans to assess the adequacy of flexible working arrangements specifically for maternity staff at this time.

## ■ Neurofibromatosis

**Sarah Owen:**

**[8879]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to develop standardised national guidelines for the (a) identification and (b) treatment of neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1).

**Andrew Gwynne:**

We remain committed to the UK Rare Diseases Framework, which highlights helping patients get a final diagnosis faster, and improved access to specialist care, treatment, and drugs as priorities to improve the lives of people with living with rare diseases.

NHS England commissions a service for adults and children with complex neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1). This is provided by Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. The overall aim of the service is to provide the highest quality of care to people with complex NF1 through accurate diagnosis, including genetic testing, coordinated care from a specialist multidisciplinary team, monitoring of complications of the disease, and referral to other specialties as required. The two national centres and a multi-disciplinary team of senior doctors and nurses co-ordinate diagnosis and long-term care of patients with complex NF1. A referral is needed to access this service, and both centres also accept non-complex NF1 referrals. The clinicians in the complex NF1 team contribute to the evidence base on this condition, including development of international guidelines. Genetic testing for NF1 is available through the NHS Genomic Medicine Service.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has no plans to develop a guideline on NF1. With the exception of health technology evaluations, where the NICE's responsibilities are clearly defined, the NICE will not routinely produce guidelines that relate to single rare diseases. Instead, they seek to identify commonalities between conditions to provide products that can be applied across multiple rare disease groups.

NICE guidelines are developed by experts based on a thorough assessment of the available evidence, and through extensive engagement with interested parties. They describe best practice, and healthcare professionals are expected to take them fully into account in the care and treatment of their patients, although they are not mandatory and do not override a clinician's responsibility to make decisions appropriate to individual patients.

## ■ North East London Health and Care Partnership: Baby Care Units

**Nesil Caliskan:**

[\[8344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many times have neonatal units in the North East London Health & Care Partnership reached capacity since 1 May 2022.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department does not hold this data centrally. NHS England is investing £45 million to increase neonatal cot capacity. This investment has started to improve cot capacity in London, and will continue to do so by March 2025.

## ■ Obesity: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[9123\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of trends in childhood obesity levels in (a) South Holland and The Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire in each of the last three years.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) collects data on children in Reception, aged four to five years old, and children in Year 6, aged 10 to 11 years old. It provides detailed trend data on children's weight status, including childhood obesity. Data on obesity prevalence from the NCMP is available for the school years 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, and 2022/23, with 2022/23 being the most recent year for which data is available. There is no data available for Lincolnshire for 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with all of the data for 2019/20 having been collected before the COVID-19 pandemic. Data is not available at a constituency level, but is available at a local authority level. For Lincolnshire, the prevalence of obesity in 2022/23 for both children aged four to five years old and those aged 10 to 11 years old is similar to the pre-pandemic levels in 2019/20. The following table shows the obesity prevalence as a percentage for children in Reception and Year 6 in Lincolnshire, where the data is available, each year from 2019/20 to 2022/23:

Area	Obesity prevalence							
	Reception				Year 6			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Lincolnshire	10.5%	No data	11.0%	9.4%	22.2%	No data	24.3%	23.2%

## ■ Oropouche Virus

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[9169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help prevent cases of Oropouche virus; and what discussions he has had with devolved Administrations on that virus.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) continuously monitors the global epidemiology of the Oropouche virus disease, and assesses risk to the United Kingdom's population. The UKHSA works to reduce risk through the provision of travel advice to both travellers and healthcare professionals, including through the National Travel Health Network and Centre and through awareness raising through media engagement, when appropriate.

The UKHSA has undertaken specific work to raise the awareness of the Oropouche virus disease among healthcare professionals, including targeted communication and discussion with professional obstetrics and gynaecology networks. UKHSA subject matter experts have contributed to publications in scientific and medical journals to raise clinician awareness. The UKHSA has also provided expert commentary to media outlets, to ensure that accurate travel health advice is included in media articles.

Molecular testing for acute Oropouche virus disease is available in the UK through the UKHSA's Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory (RIPL), in Porton Down. Following the increase in cases in the Americas in 2024, the RIPL has also been performing active surveillance through testing samples submitted for dengue diagnosis, where the patient has travelled to a region affected by the Oropouche virus disease and subsequently tests negative for dengue. No imported cases have been detected in the UK to date. Epidemiological alerts published by the Pan American Health Organisation and World Health Organisation have been shared with the devolved administration's public health organisations

**■ Palliative Care: East of England****Victoria Collins:****[8955]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Universal Care Plan for London to the East of England.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department is not planning to make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Universal Care Plan, as this would be a decision for local determination by commissioners and their providers.

As we work towards a single patient record, we will be engaging with the public, professions, and stakeholders to understand what matters to them, and we will be keen to hear their experience of local or regional programmes, to join up data to support patient care.

**■ Palliative Care: Standards****Victoria Collins:****[8728]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the provision of full-time community palliative and end of life care.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We want a society where every person receives high-quality, compassionate care, from diagnosis through to the end of life. The Government is determined to shift more healthcare out of hospitals and into the community, to ensure patients and their families receive personalised care in the most appropriate setting, and palliative and end of life care will have a big role to play in that shift.

Palliative care services are included in the list of services an integrated care board (ICB) must commission. NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications to support ICBs in this duty, which make specific reference to the fact that commissioners should ensure there is sufficient access to continuous care.

I recently met NHS England and discussions have begun on how to reduce inequalities and variation in access to, and the quality of, palliative and end of life care. We will consider next steps on palliative and end of life care in the coming months.

**■ Pharmacy: Community Health Services****Rebecca Smith:**[\[8741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of community pharmacies have dispensed medications at a loss in each of the last three years.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We do not hold this information. Community pharmacy reimbursement arrangements do not aim to ensure that every pharmacy is paid as much or more than it paid for every product, but aims overall to reimburse as much as they were bought for, plus the allowed medicine margin. The medicine margin is the difference between the product price reimbursed by the National Health Service and the price at which pharmacies buy them. As part of the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) in 2023/24, pharmacies were allowed to retain £850 million from the medicine margin, on top of what they are paid for the medicines they purchase as part of providing NHS services. The Department assesses the medicines margin retained through a quarterly margin survey, which has found that more than the amount agreed as part of the CPCF has been delivered in total across the previous four financial years.

**■ Prescriptions****Rebecca Smith:**[\[8991\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending prescribing rights to (a) dietitians, (b) occupational therapists, (c) prosthetists and orthotists, (d) diagnostic radiographers, (e) speech and language therapists and (f) other healthcare professionals.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department works with NHS England to ensure that the prescribing responsibilities for all Allied Health Professionals are regularly reviewed and updated. Where it is deemed clinically appropriate and necessary to extend prescribing responsibilities to Allied Health Professionals, the Department follows an established process for making changes that ensures proposals are safe and beneficial for patients.

Regarding wider work related to non-medical prescribing, in late 2020 NHS England launched a series of public consultations seeking views on proposals to amend responsibilities for the prescribing, supply, and administration of medicines for the following professionals:

- dental hygienists and dental therapists;
- biomedical scientists, clinical scientists, and operating department practitioners;
- podiatrists and physiotherapists; and
- paramedics.

This work was undertaken as part of the Chief Professions Officers' medicines mechanisms (CPOMM) programme. The Department is working with NHS England to consider the CPOMM consultations and progress the extension of responsibilities to supply, administer, or prescribe medicines under the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 (HMRs 2012) to regulated healthcare professionals, where a clear need and benefits have been identified.

For example, in June 2024 the Department completed work to amend the HMRs 2012 to allow dental hygienists and dental therapists to supply and administer specified medicines via exemptions, and pharmacy technicians to use Patient Group Directions. This legislation came into force in late June 2024. At present, the Department is reviewing priorities for progressing work in the CPOMM programme.

**■ Prisons: Drugs****Rachael Maskell:****[7804]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many prisoners have required medical attention for (a) suspected overdoses and (b) drug-related ill health in each quarter of each of the last ten years.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department does not hold information on the number of prisoners requiring medical attention for suspected overdoses and drug related ill health.

## ■ Prostate Cancer

**Tim Farron:**

[\[9152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is planning to take steps to implement (a) a national screening programme and (b) other early diagnosis initiatives for prostate cancer.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Screening for prostate cancer is currently not recommended by the UK National Screening Committees (UK NSC). This is because of the inaccuracy of the current best test, the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA). A PSA-based screening programme will harm some men as many would be diagnosed with a cancer that would not have caused them problems during their life. This would lead to additional tests and treatments which can also have harmful side effects, for instance sexual dysfunction and incontinence.

The UK NSC regularly reviews its recommendations and the evidence review for prostate cancer screening is underway, and plans to report within the UK NSC's three-year work plan.

The evidence review includes modelling the clinical effectiveness and cost 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.

We are also working with NHS England to support the National Health Service to meet the Faster Diagnosis Standard for cancer to be diagnosed or ruled out within 28 days from an urgent suspected cancer referral. This includes introducing best practice timed pathways for prostate cancer to streamline diagnostic pathways and speed up diagnoses.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**

[\[9220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he is issuing guidance to GPs encouraging them to discuss a PSA test with men at the highest risk of developing prostate cancer.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK National Screening Committee is carrying out an evidence review of prostate cancer screening which includes looking at the evidence for targeted screening of specific high-risk groups. This will determine whether a Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test-based screening programme for high-risk groups could provide more good than harm.

Based on the current evidence, the guidance to general practices is not to proactively offer a PSA to men without symptoms as the high level of inaccuracy could lead to unnecessary tests that carry risks of life-changing harm, such as urinary and faecal incontinence, sexual dysfunction, as well as a smaller but serious risk of sepsis.

Additionally, some prostate cancers may not produce elevated PSA levels, leading to false-negative results that provide deceptive reassurance.

## ■ Rare Diseases: Health Services

**Peter Dowd:**

[\[8646\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to take steps to prioritise improvement of care for (a) rare blood disorders and (b) other rare and ultra-rare conditions.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Improving the lives of people living with rare and ultra-rare conditions, such as rare blood disorders, continues to be a health priority. We remain committed to the UK Rare Diseases Framework, which highlights four priorities to improve the lives of people with rare diseases, including better coordination of care, and improved access to specialist care, treatment, and drugs.

We're working hard to provide the best possible care to those living with rare blood disorders, such as sickle cell disease and thalassaemia. NHS England's priorities for the improvement of care for rare blood disorders includes an established programme of work to improve clinical pathways and care for people with sickle cell disease, which has recently been expanded to include thalassaemia. We are also boosting Ro subtype blood donation numbers and delivering world-leading treatments, such as the new blood matching genetic test which will reduce the risk of side effects and offer more personalised care.

NHS England commissions services for patients with Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia Purpura across 11 hospitals. This is an aggressive blood clotting disease which is difficult to diagnose and has a high mortality rate if left untreated. In the acute phase of the disease patients need rapid access to specialist care. This is a lifelong condition, and patients receive ongoing monitoring by the multidisciplinary team, shared care with local hospitals, and access to specialist drugs.

The National Health Service is reviewing and updating the service specification for haemophilia care through the Blood Disorders Clinical Reference Group, alongside a new quality dashboard that will enable commissioners to monitor the quality of the services in their areas, benchmarked against other services across the country.

**Peter Dowd:**

[\[8647\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the progress of work under the UK Rare Diseases Framework; and what steps his Department plans to take to ensure that rare disease continues to be a health priority.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

A rare disease is defined as a disease or condition which affects fewer than one in 2,000 people within the general population. While they are individually rare, they are collectively common, and one in 17 people will be affected by a rare disease at some point in their lives.



Improving the lives of people living with rare conditions continues to be a health priority. The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities, collaboratively developed with the rare disease community, which are: helping patients get a final diagnosis faster; increasing awareness of rare diseases among healthcare professionals; better coordination of care; and improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. We remain committed to delivering under the framework and will publish an annual England Action Plan in 2025, which will report on progress.

The annual England Action Plan sets out specific, measurable actions for the next year under the framework's four priority areas. To ensure delivery and accountability, each action lists an owner, the desired outcomes, and how we will measure and report on progress. We have also committed to commissioning a portfolio level evaluation of England's Rare Diseases Action Plans to measure progress for people living with rare conditions. This evaluation is now underway, and we look forward to updating on next steps in 2025.

**Peter Dowd:**

**[8648]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what resources are available to support care coordination across (a) geographical areas and (b) disciplines for rare and ultra-rare conditions.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

We remain committed to the UK Rare Diseases Framework, which highlights better coordination of care as a priority to improve the lives of people with rare diseases.

Under England's Rare Diseases Action Plans, we have committed to a range of measures to improve coordination of care. Last year, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published an updated quality standard on transition from paediatric to adult care, to support better co-ordination of care. NHS England continues to review and approve applications for new rare disease collaborative networks (RDCNs) across a range of specialties and disease groups. The RDCNs are an important part of NHS England's provision to improve care and support patients with rare diseases. They are made up of groups of providers who have an interest in developing an understanding of a particular rare disease, and who are committed to working together to progress research, increase knowledge, and improve patient experience.

NHS England committed to include the definition of coordination of care in all new and revised services specifications for patients with rare diseases, and to ensure the priorities of the UK Rare Diseases Framework are embedded across highly specialised services. All highly specialised centres are required to work collaboratively with other providers in the service and to have shared care arrangements in place with local hospitals, as required.

NHS England is implementing networked models of care for patients with rare diseases, ensuring that specialist expertise is always available whilst allowing patients to be treated and cared for as close to home as possible. In addition, NHS England has committed to measuring the geographic spread of patients accessing

highly specialised services to ensure that all patients have access to the services, and are not disadvantaged. A toolkit for virtual consultations was developed in 2023, and made available to all trust chief executives and highly specialised services clinical leads, to help people with complex, multi-system rare diseases access multiple specialists without needing to travel.

**Peter Dowd:**

**[8649]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of the National Paroxysmal Nocturnal Haemoglobinuria Service for care coordination for people with rare diseases; and what steps his Department is taking to help such patients to access multi-disciplinary care.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities to improve the lives of people living with rare diseases, such as Paroxysmal Nocturnal Haemoglobinuria (PNH). This includes the priority of improving co-ordination of care.

NHS England commissions services for patients with PNH from two centres, the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and the King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. These two services work collaboratively to provide specialist care and care coordination to patients with PNH in England. This involves specialist diagnosis, multidisciplinary team care, shared care with local hospitals, and access to specialist drugs. The centres also provide outreach clinics. The service is recognised as an exemplar and has reduced mortality and improved outcomes for patients.

**Peter Dowd:**

**[8650]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will take steps with local Integrated Care Boards to help ensure that rare disease services are delivered according to the priorities set out in the Rare Disease Framework.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets a high-level strategy to focus action across the healthcare system to address the four priorities of: helping patients get a final diagnosis faster; increasing awareness of rare diseases among healthcare professionals; better coordination of care; and improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning some specialised healthcare services, which help treat patients with rare diseases, whereas others are commissioned centrally by NHS England. For those specialised services commissioned by ICBs, the ICBs must commission the services in line with service specifications and standards published by NHS England. NHS England remains accountable for the effective arrangement of those specialised services.

## ■ Respiratory Syncytial Virus: Vaccination

**Sir Edward Leigh:**

[\[9121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of age-based eligibility criteria for the respiratory syncytial virus vaccine.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

In June 2023, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) suggested an initial respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) programme to potentially vaccinate a cohort aged from 75 to 79 years old, and then for those turning 75 years old in subsequent years. The Department accepted the JCVI's advice, and this is the current policy for the programme.

The JCVI has not provided advice on other groups, as the analysis that informed their advice looked at burden by age. The JCVI noted that the burden of RSV in older adults is comparatively less well understood than in infants, and is considered to be underestimated by existing routine surveillance. The committee agreed that more work was required to obtain better estimates of the RSV burden in adults. These analyses will include people in clinical risk groups.

RSV vaccination programmes to protect older adults and newborn babies, via maternal vaccination, began on 1 September in England. The Department will consider any further JCVI advice on who should be offered an RSV immunisation, as the committee continues to keep the evidence under review.

## ■ Smoking

**Paul Holmes:**

[\[8902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the impact of the generational smoking ban on Exchequer revenues in the context of the findings of the Office for Budget Responsibility outlined on page 42 of the Institute of Fiscal Studies' report entitled The outlook for the public finances in the new parliament, published on 10 October 2024.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill will be the biggest public health intervention in a generation, tackling the harms of smoking and paving the way for a smoke-free United Kingdom. Smoking costs the economy and wider society £21.8 billion a year. This includes an annual £18.3 billion loss to productivity, through smoking related lost earnings, unemployment, and early death, along with £3.1 billion of costs to the National Health Service and social care. This exceeds the £8.8 billion received in tobacco duties in 2023/24.

Alongside the bill, we will publish an impact assessment which will include an estimate for the impact on tobacco duty receipts. HM Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs have consulted on proposals for a Vaping Products Duty. This would seek to discourage non-smokers and young people from taking up vaping and to raise

revenue. HM Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs are reviewing the responses to this consultation and will respond in due course.

### ■ **Soft Drinks: Taxation**

**Rebecca Smith:** **[8736]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the impact of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy on children's (a) oral health and (b) associated dental care.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

No specific assessment has been made. Sugar consumption is the main risk factor for tooth decay. Reducing consumption of foods and drinks that contain sugar, alongside adequate exposure to fluoride, including daily toothbrushing with fluoride toothpaste, has a positive effect on children's oral health and associated dental care.

### ■ **Sunscreens**

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** **[8987]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has funded awareness campaigns to encourage the use of sunscreen to prevent melanoma in the last three years.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** **[8988]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has plans to fund awareness campaigns to encourage the use of sunscreen to prevent melanoma.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** **[8989]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether officials in his Department have had discussions with their counterparts in the Treasury on the potential merits of funding measures to improve access to sunscreen.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Department continues to advise patients to follow National Health Service guidance on reducing the risk of melanoma. This advice is available publicly on the NHS website, via the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/seasonal-health/sunscreen-and-sun-safety/>

The Department is not taking any additional steps, currently or within the last three years, to specifically fund awareness campaigns to encourage the use of sunscreen to prevent melanoma.

### ■ **Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme**

**Sir Christopher Chope:** **[9409]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to provide (a) healthcare and (b) financial support to people whose applications to the Vaccine

Damage Payments Scheme were rejected on the basis that they do not have a severe disablement that exceeds the 60% threshold.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

We expect that individuals whose claims to the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme (VDPS) have been rejected on the basis that they do not meet the 60% disability threshold would receive the same level of treatment and care from the National Health Service as those with any other long-term condition requiring support.

The VDPS is not a compensation scheme. It does not prejudice the right of the disabled person to pursue a claim for damages through the courts. Other Government support remains open to claimants with a disability or long-term health condition, including Statutory Sick Pay, Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, Attendance Allowance, and Personal Independence Payments.

## HOME OFFICE

■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]**

**Tim Roca:**

[\[900759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress she has made on establishing a Border Security Command.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

We have created the Border Security Command to lead the fight against the criminal smuggling gangs who threaten our border, put lives at risk, and undermine our national security, and we have been delighted to appoint the former Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council, Martin Hewitt, to lead that work.

Backed by £75 million of funding, the Border Security Command is already working closely with operational partners in the UK and overseas towards our shared goal to disrupt and dismantle this criminal trade in human lives.

**Mike Reader:**

[\[900761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress she has made on banning zombie-style knives and ninja swords.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

We have implemented the ban on zombie-style knives and zombie-style machetes approved by Parliament earlier this year. The ban came into force on 24th September.

We will also be pressing ahead as soon as possible with a ban on Ninja swords, following the tireless campaigning of Pooja Kanda whose son Ronan was killed with one of these lethal weapons. We will be launching a consultation shortly and plan to introduce the legislation shortly afterwards when Parliamentary time allows.

**Jack Abbott:**

[\[900763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress she has made on banning zombie-style knives and ninja swords.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

We have implemented the ban on zombie-style knives and zombie-style machetes approved by Parliament earlier this year. The ban came into force on 24th September.

We will also be pressing ahead as soon as possible with a ban on Ninja swords, following the tireless campaigning of Pooja Kanda whose son Ronan was killed with one of these lethal weapons. We will be launching a consultation shortly and plan to introduce the legislation shortly afterwards when Parliamentary time allows.

**Dr Marie Tidball:**

[\[900764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour on high streets and in town centres.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Town centres and high streets are the heart of our communities but for far too long rampant antisocial behaviour, shoplifting and street crime has been corroding people's sense of safety in their communities.

That's why this Government will put thousands of neighbourhood police and community support officers back on the beat in local communities so residents know who to turn to when things go wrong, and we will crack down on those causing havoc on our high streets with new Respect Orders so local people can take back their town centres from thugs and thieves.

**Jon Pearce:**

[\[900765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation.

**Dan Jarvis:**

We will continue to consider all tools at our disposal to protect the UK and our interests from Iran-linked threats.

More than 400 Iranian individuals and entities, including the IRGC in its entirety are sanctioned.

We keep the list of proscribed organisations under constant review and continue to work at pace to identify further ways to tackle Iranian state threats.

The National Security Act 2023 provides another significant toolkit in the fight against individuals working for state entities like the IRGC. The UK is now a harder target for those states which seek to conduct hostile acts against the UK, including espionage, interference in our political system, sabotage, and assassination.

The Government continually assesses potential threats to the UK, and takes the protection of individuals' rights, freedoms, and safety incredibly seriously – wherever those threats may originate.

**Ben Maguire:**

[\[900766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking with the police to help tackle violence against women and girls in North Cornwall constituency.

**Jess Phillips:**

This Government is determined to treat violence against women and girls as the national emergency it is and we have already taken significant steps to strengthen the police response to these devastating crimes. As part of Raneem's Law we will put domestic abuse specialists in 999 control rooms and finally pilot new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders to keep victims safe and ensure perpetrators are properly pursued.

**Dan Tomlinson:**

[\[900768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle car theft.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

This Government is determined to drive down vehicle crime and we are working closely with the automotive industry and police to ensure there is a robust and rapid response whenever people have their cars stolen.

We will also bring forward legislation in the upcoming Crime and Policing Bill to ban electronic devices used to steal vehicles, empowering the police and courts to target the criminals using, manufacturing and supplying those devices.

**Mike Martin:**

[\[900769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking with police forces to tackle violence against women and girls.

**Jess Phillips:**

This Government is determined to treat violence against women and girls as the national emergency it is and we have already taken significant steps to strengthen the police response to these devastating crimes. As part of Raneem's Law we will put domestic abuse specialists in 999 control rooms and finally pilot new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders to keep victims safe and ensure perpetrators are properly pursued.

**Josh Newbury:**

[\[900770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent progress her Department has made on recruiting police officers and police community support officers.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

This Government is committed to strengthening neighbourhood policing as part of our Safer Streets Mission, putting neighbourhood police officers and community support officers back on the beat in every part of the country.

We are currently working closely with policing to design our Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, which will involve guaranteed local patrols and new tools for the police to crack down on the crimes blighting communities, including shoplifting and antisocial behaviour.

■ **Anti-social Behaviour: South Basildon and East Thurrock**

**James McMurdock:** [\[9094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she plans to take to tackle anti-social behaviour in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Tackling anti-social behaviour is a top priority for this Government, and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission to take back our streets.

We will put thousands of new neighbourhood police and community support officers back on the beat in local communities, and ensure that residents have a named officer they can turn to when things go wrong.

We will crack down on those causing havoc on our high streets by introducing tougher powers via a Crime and Policing Bill, including new Respect Order to tackle repeat offending.

■ **Electric Bicycles and Electric Scooters**

**Sojan Joseph:** [\[9322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with police forces on the enforcement of the law governing the use of electric bikes and scooters.

**Sojan Joseph:** [\[9323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help tackle anti-social behaviour associated with the use of electric bikes and scooters in Ashford constituency.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Tackling anti-social behaviour is a top priority for this Government, and a key part of our Safer Streets Mission to take back our streets. The Government will give police the powers they need to take illegal, dangerous and antisocial vehicles off the streets for good and quickly destroy the vehicles they seize from offenders. We will set out more information in due course.

However, the use of those powers and the enforcement of road traffic law, including in relation to the anti-social use of electric bikes and electric scooters, remains an operational matter for Chief Officers who will decide how to deploy available resources, taking into account any specific local problems and demands.



## ■ **Electronic Travel Authorisations: EU Countries**

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[8225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether airlines who will have responsibility for checking electronic travel authorisations (ETA) for EU nationals from 2 April 2025 will also have the ability to check (a) EU identity cards and (b) EU passports in order to verify those with settled status are exempt from the requirement to hold an ETA.

**Seema Malhotra:**

If their passengers hold an ETA and are seeking to travel to the UK using the passport they used to apply for their ETA, airlines will receive automated messaging confirming the existence of a permission to travel.

If their passengers hold an eVisa and are seeking to travel on a passport registered on their Home Office account, airlines will receive automated messaging confirming the existence of a permission to travel.

EU, EEA and Swiss nationals with settled or pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) should register their passport and national identity card (if held) onto their Home Office account. This will ensure airlines receive the correct automated messaging if they seek to travel with either document.

It is important that all individuals with an eVisa (including those with status under the EUSS) keep their travel documents up to date and registered onto their Home Office account.

## ■ **Home Office: Vivastreet**

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[9202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many times (a) Ministers and (b) officials from her Department have met representatives of Vivastreet (i) online and (ii) in person since 4 July 2024.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[9203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish the (a) minutes and (b) other contemporaneous written records made by officials of all meetings between her Department and Vivastreet since 2017.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[9204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce demand for (a) prostitution and (b) trafficking for sexual exploitation by men who pay for sex.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[9205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the role of websites advertising prostitution in facilitating trafficking for sexual exploitation.

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[9206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of the number of people who would be deterred from paying for sex if it was outlawed.

**Jess Phillips:**

Sexual exploitation is a truly horrific crime. This Government has committed to halve violence against women and girls in a decade, and we use all our levers to deliver this.

The advertising of sexual services has increasingly moved online, and we know that adult service websites are now the most significant enabler of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Online platforms need to be responsible and accountable for content on their sites and take proactive steps to prevent their sites being used by criminals. The Online Safety Act 2023 sets out priority offences, including sexual exploitation and human trafficking offences, and companies will need to adopt measures and put in place systems and processes to identify, assess and address these offences based on a risk assessment.

We must ensure law enforcement use every tool to pursue perpetrators and that victims are supported to recover from this horrendous abuse. The Government is working closely with policing and others to help tackle the drivers, including through operational intensifications to target perpetrators.

Prostitution more broadly is an extremely complex issue and there are a wide range of potential approaches. We are committed to making our streets safer by tackling the harm and exploitation which can be associated with it and ensuring that people who want to leave are given every opportunity to find routes out.

Home Office Ministers and officials have not had any meetings with Vivastreet since the General Election on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024. There are no plans to publish minutes or other written records of previous meetings with Vivastreet as these meetings were informal in nature and no minutes or records were taken.

This government will ensure adult sexual exploitation is part of our VAWG.

## ■ Immigration: Applications

**Kim Johnson:**

[\[8482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when her Department began using Equifax checks as part of the fee waiver assessment process for leave to remain applications.

**Kim Johnson:**

[\[8483\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to minimise unnecessary data (a) collection and (b) sharing through Equifax during the fee waiver application process.

**Kim Johnson:**

[8484]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department confidentially destroys third party data received as part of Equifax checks conducted in fee waiver applications.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Home Office have had contracts to enable financial checking since at least 2014 and therefore financial checks may have been used as part of fee waiver considerations from this date.

As outlined in the Fee Waiver guidance, checks may be undertaken with agencies such as HM Revenue & Customs, the Department for Work and Pensions and credit checking agencies (for example Equifax or Experian) to verify information provided by the applicant with regard to their income and finances.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applications-for-a-fee-waiver-and-refunds>

The declaration that is completed by customers as part of their application outlines the fact that such checks are undertaken. Decision makers will also gain written consent from individuals for checks to be undertaken where we do not already hold it.

## ■ Immigration: Scotland

**John Lamont:**

[9525]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a bespoke immigration route for Scotland.

**John Lamont:**

[9526]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a bespoke immigration route for Scotland.

**John Lamont:**

[9527]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will hold discussions with the Migration Advisory Committee on the potential merits of establishing a bespoke immigration route for Scotland.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Government has no plans to devolve immigration policy or introduce a Scottish visa scheme. We are focussed on having an immigration system that works in the interests of the whole of the United Kingdom.

The Government has not tasked the MAC to look at the issue of Scottish visas and have no plans to do so.

**■ Knives: Amnesties**

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[9133\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to publish a consultation on the potential merits of introducing a knife amnesty.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

We have no plans to consult on a general knife amnesty.

The Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Amendment, Surrender and Compensation) Order 2024 came in to force on 24 September 2024 and it is now unlawful to sell, supply, manufacture or possess zombie-style knives or zombie-style machetes. Prior to the legislation coming in to force we ran a surrender and compensation scheme between 26 August 2024 and 23 September 2024 to allow owners to surrender these items safely at designated police stations.

We will also introduce a ban on Ninja swords as soon as possible. We will be launching a consultation about this shortly and plan to introduce the legislation after the conclusion of that consultation when Parliamentary time allows.

**■ LGBT+ People: Hate Crime**

**Tom Hayes:** [\[8932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to bring forward legislation to make anti-LGBTQ+ hate crime an aggravated offence.

**Tom Hayes:** [\[8933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps with Cabinet colleagues to develop a national action plan to tackle hate crime.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Government is absolutely committed to tackling all forms of hate crime and has already committed to protect LGBT+ and disabled people by making all existing strands of hate crime an aggravated offence.

We will set out next steps in due course.

**■ Police: Technology**

**Chris Philp:** [\[9189\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to paragraph 5.6 of the Spring Budget 2024, published on 6 March 2024, HC 560, how much and what proportion of the £230 million funding for new police technology is being spent in the 2024-25 financial year.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Final figures for the amount spent on police technology in the 2024 financial year from the £234m announced at the Spring Budget will be available to publish at the end of that financial year.

## ■ Vehicle Number Plates: Crime

**Preet Kaur Gill:** [\[8669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle illegal license plates.

**Preet Kaur Gill:** [\[8670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many illegal license plates have been seized by the police in each of the last five years.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Government is working closely with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) to improve the identification and enforcement of number plate crime.

We do not hold information centrally on illegal licence plate seizures.

## ■ Visas: Applications

**Mr Lee Dillon:** [\[8388\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she plans to take to improve the (a) cost, (b) accessibility and (c) appeal process of visa applications.

**Seema Malhotra:**

The Government regularly reviews the cost and accessibility of visas and process of appeals to ensure that public services are efficient and provide value for money to the taxpayer.

## ■ Visas: Digital Technology

**Mr Alex Barros-Curtis:** [\[8565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of people eligible for an eVisa to replace their Biometric Residence Permit have not yet applied to do so; and if she will make an estimate of the number of people who will apply for an eVisa to replace their Biometric Residence Permit in the period between 10 October 2024 and 31 December 2024.

**Seema Malhotra:**

During the transition to eVisas, we are closely monitoring the volume of customers who have registered for a UKVI account and the forecast total volume of affected customers. The total volume will be dictated by ongoing approvals under BRP generating routes through to the end of 2024. This data requires detailed assurance before it can be published externally, which is currently underway. We plan to make this data available on gov.uk in due course.

Currently, an extensive communications campaign is being delivered in support of the transition to eVisas, to help raise awareness of eVisas, build understanding of how it applies to visa holders and checkers, and encourage them to take action. This campaign is taking place alongside numerous engagement events; in the last 12

months, over 180 engagement events have been undertaken with circa 26,000 participants, to raise awareness of the transition to eVisa with intermediaries, encouraging them to share the information with their customers, staff, clients, and members.

**Mr Alex Barros-Curtis:**

[8566]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to publicise the need to register for eVisas to replace a Biometric Residence Permit.

**Seema Malhotra:**

An extensive communications campaign is being delivered in support of the transition from physical immigration documents to eVisas, to raise awareness of eVisas, build understanding of how it applies to visa holders and checkers, and encourage them to take action. This includes activity and messaging specifically targeting biometric residence permit (BRP) holding customers to register for a UKVI account by the end of 2024, when most BRPs expire, if they were not automatically provided with a UKVI account and eVisa when their most recent immigration application was approved.

The dedicated eVisa communications activity has run from Spring 2024 onwards and has included regular updates to GOV.UK, including the establishment of a dedicated eVisa webpage at [www.gov.uk/eVisa](http://www.gov.uk/eVisa), and online resources such as eVisa support videos, direct messaging to customers via email and text message, and a wide-ranging programme of engagement with relevant stakeholders and international carriers. A national eVisa advertising campaign to raise awareness of these changes commenced on 10 October 2024.

All communications activity has directed visa holders to [www.gov.uk/eVisa](http://www.gov.uk/eVisa), and, where appropriate, has highlighted the range of available support.

Alongside this campaign, over 180 engagement events have also been undertaken in the last 12 months, with circa 26,000 participants, to raise awareness of the transition to eVisa with intermediaries, encouraging them to share information with their customers, staff, clients, and members.

**Mr Alex Barros-Curtis:**

[8567]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what technical support her Department offers to people applying for eVisas to replace their Biometric Residence Permit.

**Seema Malhotra:**

Our Assisted Digital service (<https://www.gov.uk/assisted-digital-help-online-applications>) is available in the UK to provide support by phone and email to those who need help with IT-related aspects of creating a UKVI account.

Customers can also contact the UK Visas and Immigration Resolution Centre (<https://www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-inside-outside-uk>) for support via email and webchat, and telephone. They also support people through the online journey by:

- helping them to access or recover their account

- helping them to update their personal details
- sharing status on behalf of people if they are unable to do so themselves.

The UK Visas and Immigration Resolution Centre can also help people with any technical issues with their online immigration status, and, where necessary, verify the person's status through alternative means.

The Home Office is committed to ensuring everyone, including the most vulnerable, are properly supported as we transform our immigration system. On 18 September 2024, we announced that the Government is providing up to £4m in dedicated grant funding to a UK wide network of voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver valuable support to those who need it, during the transition from physical immigration documents to eVisas.

To date, grant funding agreements are in place with four organisations that will provide national coverage.

**Sarah Gibson:**

**[8582]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to improve communication on the validity of legacy paper documents for people who do not have an e-visa.

**Seema Malhotra:**

An extensive communications campaign is being delivered in support of the transition from physical immigration documents to eVisas, to raise awareness of eVisas, build understanding of how it applies to visa holders and checkers, and encourage them to take action. This includes activity and messaging specifically targeting biometric residence permit (BRP) holding customers to register for a UKVI account by the end of 2024, when most BRPs expire, if they were not automatically provided with a UKVI account and eVisa when their most recent immigration application was approved.

Our communications also explain that customers with older forms of evidence of immigration status, such as ink stamps in passports, will still be able to prove their rights as they do today, using their legacy documents where these are permitted. However, we encourage those individuals to transition to an eVisa, which offers a range of benefits to customers and status checkers.

The dedicated eVisa communications activity has run from Spring 2024 onwards and has included regular updates to GOV.UK, including the establishment of a dedicated eVisa webpage at [www.gov.uk/eVisa](http://www.gov.uk/eVisa), and online resources such as eVisa support videos, direct messaging to customers via email and text message, and a wide-ranging programme of engagement with relevant stakeholders and international carriers. A national eVisa advertising campaign to raise awareness of these changes commenced on 10 October 2024.

All communications activity has directed visa holders to [www.gov.uk/eVisa](http://www.gov.uk/eVisa), and, where appropriate, has highlighted the range of available support.

**Mr Toby Perkins:**

**[8635]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to (a) minimise disruption resulting from the transition to e-Visas and (b) ensure that older applicants are not disadvantaged by the move to an online system.

**Seema Malhotra:**

An extensive communications campaign is being delivered in support of the transition from physical immigration documents to eVisas, to raise awareness of eVisas, build understanding of how it applies to visa holders and checkers, and encourage them to take action. This includes activity and messaging specifically targeting biometric residence permit (BRP) holding customers to register for a UKVI account by the end of 2024, when most BRPs expire, if they were not automatically provided with a UKVI account and eVisa when their most recent immigration application was approved.

We continue to take steps to reduce the number of circumstances where individuals need to provide evidence of their immigration status, by making relevant immigration status information available automatically through system to system checks with public authorities and government departments. Organisations with access currently include the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), DVLA, Social Security Scotland, NHS England and Wales, Border Force, and some local authorities.

In addition to these organisations, we have also developed technology to enable airline carriers to check immigration status automatically via systems checks. If for any reason the carrier does not receive confirmation of the passenger's immigration status, they will be able to check this using the 'view and prove' service, or the carrier can contact the 24/7 Carrier Support Hub for advice.

Our communications explain that customers with older forms of evidence of immigration status, such as ink stamps in passports, will still be able to use their legacy document where permitted to prove their rights and when travelling, as they do today. However, we encourage those individuals to transition to an eVisa, which offers a range of benefits to customers and status checkers.

All communications activity has directed visa holders to [www.gov.uk/eVisa](https://www.gov.uk/eVisa), and, where appropriate, has highlighted the range of available support.

The Home Office is committed to ensuring everyone, including the elderly and the most vulnerable, are properly supported as we transform our immigration system. We have a range of support in place. This includes our Assisted Digital service (<https://www.gov.uk/assisted-digital-help-online-applications>) which is available in the UK to provide support by phone and email to those who need help with IT-related aspects of creating a UKVI account.

Customers can also contact the UK Visas and Immigration Resolution Centre ( <https://www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-inside-outside-uk> ) for support via email and webchat, and telephone. They also support people through the online journey by:

- helping them to access or recover their account



- helping them to update their personal details
- sharing status on behalf of people if they are unable to do so themselves.

The UK Visas and Immigration Resolution Centre can also help people with any technical issues with their online immigration status, and, where necessary, verify the person's status through alternative means.

On 18 September 2024, we announced that the Government is providing up to £4m in dedicated grant funding to a UK wide network of voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver valuable support to those who need it, during the transition from physical immigration documents to eVisas.

To date, grant funding agreements are in place with four organisations that will provide national coverage.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

### ■ House of Commons: Electric Vehicles

**Sir Christopher Chope:**

[\[9117\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many dedicated charging points for electric vehicles belonging to hon. Members are available in the House of Commons underground car park; how many and what proportion of those charging points are fast chargers; whether those charging points are free at the point of use; and whether an estimate has been made of the average cost to the public purse of electricity consumption from the use of those charging points during a sitting week.

**Nick Smith:**

There are two dedicated electrical vehicle charging points in the underground car park. This is supplemented by 12 key controlled socket outlets that provide trickle charging. Owners with certified and PAT tested chargers can request a key to use the sockets for trickle charging. There are no fast chargers.

The New Palace Yard Underground Car Park Project is exploring the installation of new charging points. Users of these charging points would be expected to pay for the service. Currently charging is free at the point of use. No estimate has been made of the cost as consumption from these points is not measured separately.

### ■ Parliament Square: Demonstrations

**Mary Kelly Foy:**

[\[8673\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether House officials made representations to Westminster City Council on the application for loudspeaker consent in Parliament Square on 30 October 2024.

**Nick Smith:**

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 created a 'controlled area' surrounding Parliament where the unauthorised use of loudspeakers, the erecting of tents and the use of 'sleeping equipment' is prohibited.

The Serjeant at Arms responded to a request from Westminster City Council for views on the use of a loudspeaker in Parliament Square for 30 October 2024. The Serjeant at Arms expressed objection because of the proximity to the Chamber and the significant noise this would cause whilst the Chamber is sitting.

**Mary Kelly Foy:**[\[8674\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, what the Commission's policy is on objecting to applications received by Westminster City Council for loudspeaker consent in Parliament Square when the House is sitting.

**Nick Smith:**

Decisions over loudspeaker consent in Parliament Square are handled by the Serjeant at Arms. Each application is considered on a case-by-case basis and takes into consideration the sitting of the House and Committees, other business planned for the day, the location of the loudspeaker equipment, noise level from equipment and other considerations pertinent to the particular case. The House authorities recognise the importance of legitimate protest to our democracy; they also have a responsibility to ensure that the House is able to transact its business effectively.

**HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT****■ Affordable Housing: Construction****Steve Race:**[\[8688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much and what proportion of funding remains to be (a) allocated and (b) spent through the Affordable Homes Programme.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

As the Deputy Prime Minister made clear in her written ministerial statement of 30 July 2024, the government is aware that, particularly outside London, almost all the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme funding is contractually committed.

The programme is delivered by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in London and by Homes England in the rest of England. Homes England's Annual Report and Financial statements for 2023/24 confirm that, by the end of 2023/24, Homes England had invested £3.7 billion of its £7.4 billion budget for the 2021-26 programme.

The GLA does not publish details of its capital spending for individual programmes.

## ■ Anglesey Freeport

**Llinos Medi:** [\[9568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 25 July 2024 to Question 1070 on Anglesey Freeport, what progress she has made on the decision on the proposed Anglesey Freeport.

**Alex Norris:**

The future of the Freeports Programme will be confirmed after the Spending Review has concluded. We will return to outstanding decisions on individual Freeports, including Anglesey Freeport, at that point.

## ■ Homelessness

**Grahame Morris:** [\[9156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7728 on Homelessness, what sanctions are available to prevent local authorities from placing families significant distances out of area when discharging a homelessness duty.

**Grahame Morris:** [\[9157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7729 on Homelessness, what information her Department collects to monitor the distance of out-of-area placements.

**Grahame Morris:** [\[9158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7730 on Homelessness, what sanctions are available when a local authority fails to notify a receiving local authority of an out-of-area placement.

**Grahame Morris:** [\[9159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7731 on Homelessness, if she will require local authorities placing families out of area to make a financial contribution to the receiving local authority.

**Rushanara Ali:**

Homelessness levels are far too high and can have a devastating impact on households affected, as well as putting local authorities and their services under financial strain. Homelessness legislation and the Code of Guidance sets out that local authorities should try to place individuals within their own area, and when this is not possible, they should place the household as near as possible to the original local authority. The Government is clear that local authorities should, as far as possible, avoid placing households out of their borough. However, this is not always possible when there is a limited supply of suitable accommodation.

Under section 208 of the Housing Act 1996, if a local authority places a household into accommodation in another local area, they are required by law to notify the local authority of any placement, to ensure there is no disruption to education or employment. This notification should be happening in every out of area placement.

The department collects data on statutory homelessness applications, duties and outcomes for local authorities in England, including data on out of borough placements. The department publishes data on out of area placements in the quarterly statistics [here](#).

## ■ Housing

**Sir John Hayes:** [\[8626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made a recent assessment of the impact of population growth on housing supply.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the Rt Hon Member to my answer to Question UIN [2451](#) on 5 September 2024.

## ■ Housing: Solar Power

**Ben Coleman:** [\[8745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will amend the Future Homes and Buildings Standards to ensure that all newbuild homes include solar photovoltaic panels.

**Rushanara Ali:**

Future standards next year will set our new homes and buildings on a path that moves away from relying on volatile fossil fuels and ensures they are fit for a net zero future. This will support our ambition that the 1.5 million homes we will build over the course of this parliament will be high quality, well designed and sustainable. We are clear that rooftop solar should play an important role, where appropriate, as part of the future standards for homes and buildings.

## ■ Local Government Finance

**Mr Joshua Reynolds:** [R] [\[9385\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help secure the financial sustainability of (a) the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and (b) all local councils.

**Jim McMahon:**

This Government recognises that council funding has been under pressure since 2010. Any council that has unmanageable pressures and is concerned about its financial position should approach the department.

We will provide councils with more stability and certainty through moving towards multi-year funding settlements and by ending wasteful competitive bidding pots. This will ensure councils can plan their finances for the future properly, delivering better value for money for taxpayers. Future local authority funding decisions will be a matter for the next Spending Review and Local Government Finance Settlement in which we are engaged.

Department officials continue to engage regularly with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead regarding its financial position.

### ■ **Parking: Fees and Charges**

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[7982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that private car park charges are reasonable.

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[7983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing an independent appeals service for drivers to challenge parking charges.

**Alex Norris:**

The Government is determined to drive up standards in the private parking sector. The Private (Code of Practice) Act 2019 places a duty on the Government to prepare a code of practice containing guidance about the operation and management of private parking facilities. We will announce our plans for the new Code in due course.

### ■ **Playgrounds: Disability**

**James Naish:** [\[6721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to ensure that play areas are (a) designed and (b) upgraded to be accessible for children with SEND.

**Alex Norris:**

The Government is firmly committed to creating better access to play areas, and parks more widely. They are an essential part of local social infrastructure which supports more connected, stronger communities.

Local authorities must consider their obligations under the Equalities Act of 2010 in relation to work being done on play areas, this includes ensuring that they are accessible and inclusive. Furthermore, the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places. The Government is committed to improving opportunities and outcomes for all disabled people and putting their voices at the heart of what we do.

## ■ Prisoners: Voting Rights

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch:** [\[5629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of giving prisoners the right to vote. .

**Alex Norris:**

There has been no change to the Government's position on prisoner voting rights.

## ■ Right to Buy Scheme

**David Simmonds:** [\[8490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 30 September 2024 to Question 2675 on Council Housing: Finance, whether his Department's wider review of Right to Buy will set out potential changes in (a) primary and (b) secondary legislation.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government has made clear that it intends to bring forward a consultation in the Autumn seeking views on how the Right to Buy should be reformed. Among other things, the consultation will ask for views on eligibility criteria and protections for new homes. Implementing any changes to eligibility requirements would require primary legislation.

## ■ Shared Ownership Schemes: Disability

**Charlotte Nichols:** [\[8683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people have successfully applied for the Home Ownership for People with Long-term Disabilities (HOLD) scheme since it was launched.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The Government supports the delivery of the Home Ownership for People with Long-Term Disabilities (HOLD) scheme through the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme. To the end of March 2024, 76 homes had been funded through the Programme as part of the HOLD scheme.

## ■ Sleeping Rough

**Clive Lewis:** [\[9188\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether funding for the Rough Sleeping Initiative will continue after April 2025.

**Rushanara Ali:**

The Government is committed to addressing current high levels of rough sleeping and deliver long term solutions. We will look at these issues carefully and will develop a new cross-government strategy, working with mayors and councils across the country to get us back on track to ending homelessness once and for all.

As announced by the Chancellor on 29 July 2024, spending plans for 2025-26 will be set alongside the Budget on 30 October 2024. Following departmental review and processes, funding allocations for rough sleeping services will be announced via [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[9674]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent estimate she has made of the average length of time a rough sleeper spends rough sleeping.

**Rushanara Ali:**

Homelessness and rough sleeping levels are far too high. This can have a devastating impact on those affected. We must address this and deliver long-term solutions.

The department does not hold an estimate on the average length of time a rough sleeper spends rough sleeping. In May 2023, MHCLG launched a new data framework to better understand levels of rough sleeping, including the number of long-term rough sleepers. Our latest rough sleeping statistics publication indicates that there were 2,808 long-term rough sleepers (34% of the total) in England in June 2024.

The Government will look at these issues carefully and develop a new cross-government strategy to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness.

#### ■ **Sleeping Rough: Ealing Southall**

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[9667]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the number of people that are rough sleeping in Ealing Southall constituency.

**Rushanara Ali:**

Homelessness levels are far too high. This has a devastating impact on those affected and harms our communities.

In the Annual [Rough Sleeping Snapshot 2023](#), the London Borough of Ealing had a 121% increase in the number of people sleeping rough on a single night, increasing from 24 people in 2022 to 53 in 2023.

We must address this and deliver long-term solutions. The Government will look at these issues carefully and develop a new cross-government strategy to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness.

#### ■ **Sleeping Rough: Migrants**

**Deirdre Costigan:**

[9668]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the number of people with no recourse to public funds who are

rough sleeping in (a) the UK, (b) England, (c) London, (d) the Borough of Ealing and (e) Ealing Southall constituency.

**Deirdre Costigan:** [9669]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the number of people who have been granted asylum who are rough sleeping in (a) the UK, (b) England, (c) London, (d) the Borough of Ealing and (e) Ealing Southall constituency.

**Deirdre Costigan:** [9670]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the number of undocumented migrants who are rough sleeping in (a) the UK, (b) England, (c) London, (d) the Borough of Ealing and (e) Ealing Southall constituency.

**Rushanara Ali:**

The Government recognises that homelessness levels are far too high. Local authorities report the number of people sleeping rough who left asylum support accommodation in the last 85 days and this data is published each quarter as part of the Rough Sleeping Data Framework. In June 2024, there were 198 people recorded as sleeping rough over the course of the month after leaving asylum support accommodation. In London, there were 59 people and in Ealing Council 2 people. Our data is split by local authority and not by constituency areas. All data is available [here](#). MHCLG does not publish data on no recourse to public funds amongst people sleeping rough and on undocumented migrants sleeping rough.

#### ■ Social Rented Housing: Asylum

**Nigel Farage:** [8700]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many social housing places are accommodating asylum seekers in (a) Clacton and (b) the UK.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Social housing stock is not used to accommodate asylum seekers. If a person's immigration status does not allow them recourse to public funds, as is the case in respect of asylum seekers, then they are not eligible for an allocation of social housing.

#### ■ Temporary Accommodation

**Andrew Cooper:** [9373]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of families living in temporary accommodation in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.



**Andrew Cooper:**

[9374]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many families with children were housed in temporary accommodation in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England in each of the last five years.

**Adam Jogee:**

[9377]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help reduce the number of (a) people and (b) children living in temporary accommodation in Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

**Rushanara Ali:**

Homelessness levels are far too high. This can have a devastating impact on those affected. Local authorities report their statutory homelessness statistics on a quarterly basis and these can be accessed: [here](#).

The Government is taking action by setting up a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) which the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) will chair, bringing together ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy to put us back on track to ending homelessness.

More widely, we are taking action to tackle the root causes of homelessness, including:

- Delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation and building 1.5 million new homes over the next parliament.
- Abolishing Section 21 'no fault' evictions, preventing private renters being exploited and discriminated against, and empowering people to challenge unreasonable rent increases.

## JUSTICE

### ■ Gov Facility Services

**John McDonnell:**

[9401]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether Gov Facilities Services Limited is subject to her Department's public sector equality duty.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) is not listed as a public authority in Schedule 19 of the Equality Act 2010, however as it is publicly funded, public sector equality duties apply. Further information on how GFSL address the requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010 can be found within GFSL's Annual Report and Accounts, published annually on gov.uk.

**■ Land: Burial****Alex Mayer:** [8719]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the availability of land for burials.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Government is aware of increasing localised pressure on burial spaces in certain parts of the country and we welcome information from burial providers and local communities about the situation in their areas, as this is helpful in enabling us to build an up-to-date national picture. However, we do not have day-to-day operational responsibility for burial grounds which are managed locally. It is a matter for each authority to allocate local resources in line with local priorities.

The Law Commission is currently consulting on its proposals for reforms to burial law. The consultation includes consideration of the availability of burial space in England and Wales. The Government looks forward to the Law Commission's final recommendations in due course. The consultation can be found at:

<https://lawcom.gov.uk/project/burial-and-cremation/>.

**■ Magistrates' Courts: Sentencing****Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:** [9116]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the unduly lenient sentence scheme to cases sentenced in the Magistrates' Court.

**Heidi Alexander:**

The Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme operates in respect of qualifying sentences passed in the Crown Court, where the offender has been convicted of: (a) an indictable only offence (such as murder, manslaughter and rape); and/or (b) certain either-way offences specified by order(s). This is because the intention behind the ULS scheme is that it is reserved for the most serious cases.

Offences within scope of the scheme therefore include all indictable-only offences – such as murder, manslaughter, rape and robbery. Certain triable either way offences, mainly relating to terrorism, physical or sexual assaults, and drug related crime, are also included.

While the scheme is kept under constant review, Parliament intended this to be an exceptional power. The general rule is that a person should expect to serve the sentence a judge has imposed upon them.

**■ Ministry of Justice: Freedom of Information****John McDonnell:** [9400]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department is responsible for responding to Freedom of Information Act requests relating to Gov Facility Services Limited.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) is responsible for responding to Freedom of Information Act requests. Further information on timeliness of response to Freedom of Information requests can be found within GFSL's Annual Report and Accounts, published annually on gov.uk.

**Ministry of Justice: Trade Union Officials****John McDonnell:**[\[9397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what data her Department holds on Government Facilities Services policy on recognition of trade unions since its formation.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Department does not hold this data. Gov Facility Services Limited (GFSL) staff are subject to the Company's own terms and conditions, and GFSL does not recognise any trade union under a formal agreement. Further information on GFSL's staff policies can be found within its Annual Report and Accounts, published annually on gov.uk.

**Sentencing: Attendance****James Wild:**[\[8682\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of giving judges the power to compel offenders to appear in court for sentencing hearing for offences (a) that are punishable with imprisonment for 14 years or more and (b) where a life sentence (i) could or (ii) must be imposed.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Government is committed to legislating to enhance court powers to require offenders to attend their sentencing hearings. This precise measure will be included in the Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill which the Government intends to introduce in the first parliamentary session.

We are currently considering the policy options for delivering these measures. Further details will be made available as part of the Bill's introduction into Parliament.

**NORTHERN IRELAND****Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor****Sorcha Eastwood:**[\[9389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has had discussions with the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Government's priority is to ensure that Northern Ireland remains an attractive destination in which to live, work and invest. I regularly discuss opportunities for economic growth, including mutually beneficial cross-border opportunities, with the

Northern Ireland Executive, colleagues across the UK Government, and industry stakeholders.

Later this month, I will attend the British-Irish Chamber of Commerce Conference alongside representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and business leaders.

### ■ Elections: Northern Ireland

**Jim Allister:** [\[9676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will update the List of Specified Documents that can be used in elections in Northern Ireland to include the (a) HM Armed Forces veteran card and (b) MOD90 card.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Government intends to bring forward legislation to add the HM Armed Forces Veteran Card to the list of identity documents that may be used in Northern Ireland polling stations in advance of the next scheduled elections in Northern Ireland which will be held in 2027.

The list of identity documents that can be produced at polling stations in Northern Ireland is well established and understood. Any further changes to the list will be considered as part of a wider review.

### ■ Murder of Patrick Finucane Independent Inquiry

**Jim Allister:** [\[9642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the Answer of 8 October 2024 to Question 5642 on Murder of Patrick Finucane Independent Inquiry, what his planned timetable is for publishing the inquiry's terms of reference.

**Hilary Benn:**

I am keen that the Inquiry is able to begin its work without undue delay. The Inquiries Act 2005 sets out clear steps to follow in setting up an inquiry including the appointment of the Chair, agreement on the Terms of Reference, working through the necessary logistics such as facilities and services procurement, and setting up the Inquiry secretariat.

I will provide an update on the Terms of Reference once it has been agreed with the Chair.

### ■ Northern Ireland Office

**Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[9344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what meetings (a) Ministers and (b) his officials have held with external stakeholders since 5 July 2024.

**Hilary Benn:**

Details of ministers' and senior officials' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK.

Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

## ■ Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[8975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with the (a) Prime Minister and (b) Northern Ireland Executive on appointing a new Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner.

**Hilary Benn:**

The appointment of the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner is a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Office officials worked with Whitehall colleagues on a recruitment process for a new Commissioner, which was launched on 16 October.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:**

[\[9417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner will be a full time post.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Government recognises the dedicated service of all our veterans and is committed to supporting the veteran community across the whole of the UK.

A recruitment process for a new Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner was launched on 16 October. Details about the role can be found on the usual public appointments websites and in the local press.

Similar to the National, Scottish and Welsh Veterans' Commissioner appointments, this is not a full-time position.

We are hopeful that the recruitment process can be completed to allow the announcement of a new Commissioner towards the end of the year.

## ■ Pets: Northern Ireland

**Jim Allister:**

[\[9643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has made an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of the Windsor Framework (Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals) Regulations 2024 on pet owners.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Northern Ireland Pet Travel Scheme will significantly reduce the burdens associated with the original Northern Ireland Protocol, and provides a stable and long-term footing for pet travel for those travelling with their pets within the United Kingdom.

**■ Plants: Northern Ireland****Alex Burghart:** [\[9200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled Safeguarding the Union, published on 31 January 2024, what recent progress his Department has made on removing prohibitions on shrubs and trees.

**Hilary Benn:**

Since the publication of the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, bans have been lifted on five species of plant including hazel, wild privet and linden. The Commission has published a further seven commodity risk assessments for other species, following the provision of scientific evidence by the UK Government on the basis of industry demand. We continue to work closely with the horticultural sector, including through the Horticulture Working Group, in order to maximise opportunities for trade in plants and plant products within the United Kingdom.

**■ Sports: Finance****Jim Shannon:** [\[8827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has had discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on increasing funding for local council sports grants (a) for young sports groups and athletes in Ards and North Down Council Borough and (b) generally.

**Hilary Benn:**

My officials have engaged with Treasury officials on this matter.

The Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme has over 17 projects in 2024-25 in Northern Ireland. This Government is determined that, through our investment in grassroots sport, the legacy of the Paris Olympics and Euro 2024 is measured not just in trophies, but in choices and chances for every child wherever they live and whatever their background.

Sport is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, and I would encourage the hon Gentleman to liaise with the Department for Communities about local sports grants in his constituency.

**■ UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland****Alex Burghart:** [\[9197\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled Safeguarding the Union, published on 31 January 2024, what progress his Department has made on replacing the green lane with a UK internal market system.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Government is continuing, as set out in the Command Paper, to take steps to give effect to the internal market system. More than 9,000 businesses are registered for the existing UK Internal Market Scheme, which enables them to move goods from

Great Britain to Northern Ireland without incurring duty. From 2025, the Scheme will enable businesses to move goods into Northern Ireland using a significantly reduced data set which draws on ordinary commercial information, assisted by the new Trader Goods Profile tool which provides relevant data based on descriptions of goods.

While we will provide in due course further information on the detailed timeline for the new arrangements coming into effect, businesses should be fully prepared for them by 31 March 2025.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[9198\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled *Safeguarding the Union*, published on 31 January 2024, what progress his Department has made on establishing a UK Internal Market Guarantee.

**Hilary Benn:**

The UK Internal Market Guarantee will apply to the operation of the UK internal market system when it is given effect next year. As envisaged in the Command Paper, this will be overseen by the Independent Monitoring Panel, the appointments to which were confirmed on 19 September with preparatory work for its operation underway.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[9199\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled *Safeguarding the Union*, published on 31 January 2024, what progress his Department has made on ensuring there will be no checks when goods move within the UK internal market system save those conducted by UK authorities.

**Hilary Benn:**

As set out in the Command Paper, as we transition to the UK internal market system we are focused on ensuring the smooth flow of trade through a risk-based and intelligence-led approach to tackling criminality, abuse of the scheme, smuggling and disease risks. Those checks that are required in order to meet our international commitments will be carried out only by UK authorities or those authorised to act on their behalf.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[9528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled *Safeguarding the Union*, published on 31 January 2024, what progress his Department has made on setting out how public authorities should have special regard to Northern Ireland's place in the UK's internal market.

**Hilary Benn:**

Consistent with the commitments made in *Safeguarding the Union*, the Government published statutory guidance to public authorities on upholding their legal duties to have special regard to the UK internal market on 30 September.

**■ Veterinary Services: Northern Ireland****Alex Burghart:** [\[9530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled *Safeguarding the Union*, published on 31 January 2024, what progress his Department has made on ensuring continued supply of necessary veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland beyond 2025.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Government's priority is to secure the long-term sustainable supply of veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland and we are continuing to progress urgent work on this. We have re-established the Veterinary Medicines Working Group to advise the Government, and this met on 11 September 2024 and will meet again on 5 November 2024.

A grace period arrangement is in place until the end of 2025 which supports the continuity of supply to Northern Ireland.

**■ Windsor Framework****Alex Burghart:** [\[9531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled *Safeguarding the Union*, published on 31 January 2024, what progress his Department has made on establishing ministerial structures to (a) monitor and (b) manage issues arising from the Windsor Framework.

**Hilary Benn:**

Matters related to European affairs may be considered by Government Ministers at the Europe Cabinet Committee. These arrangements are complemented by interdepartmental structures to manage the implementation of the Windsor Framework and any issues arising therefrom, reflecting the commitments made in *Safeguarding The Union*.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[9532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled *Safeguarding the Union*, published on 31 January 2024, what progress his Department has made on establishing an independent monitoring panel.

**Hilary Benn:**

On 19 September, I announced that Aidan Reilly, Anna Jerzewska and Alastair Hamilton will be the members of the Independent Monitoring Panel. As set out in the Command Paper, the Panel will monitor and report on the implementation of the Windsor Framework.

**Alex Burghart:** [\[9533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, with reference to his Department's publication entitled *Safeguarding the Union*, published on 31 January 2024, what



progress his Department has made on establishing a strengthened independent review of the Windsor Framework.

**Hilary Benn:**

The Windsor Framework (Constitutional Status of Northern Ireland) Regulations 2024 introduced new legal requirements on the conduct of an independent review of the Windsor Framework. The commissioning of an Independent Review is dependent on the outcome of the democratic consent vote process due to take place in the Northern Ireland Assembly later this year, and the Government will follow the legal duties that apply in full.

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### ■ Emily Middleton

**John Glen:**

[\[6107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the Director General for Digital Centre Design was interviewed by the civil service before her appointment; whether she formally applied for the job in writing; and if he will publish the letter authorising her appointment.

**Feryal Clark:**

The appointment of the Director General Digital Centre Design was made as an approved exception to full external recruitment.

The creation of the role, recruitment approach and proposed candidate all received the appropriate approvals prior to confirmation of the appointment. We attach as an Annex approval from the Civil Service Commission on appointment via Exception 1 – Temporary Appointments.

### ■ Universities: Technology

**Blake Stephenson:**

[\[8702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he plans to take to support the development of tech clusters for specialist universities.

**Feryal Clark:**

The UK tech ecosystem achieved a record combined market valuation of \$1.08 trillion in 2023. Supporting its continued development across the UK is a priority for my department, and vital to this government's mission to kickstart economic growth.

As set out in the industrial strategy consultation, the UK has world-leading innovation and tech clusters across the country. This includes aviation technology around Cranfield, with Cranfield University acting as a magnet for talent and investment and anchor institution for its local innovation ecosystem.

Through the industrial strategy, we will explore how best to continue supporting high-potential clusters across the UK through R&D investment.

**SCOTLAND****■ UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Scotland**

**Chris Kane:** [\[9662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on using the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to (a) support accessible tourism and (b) improve facilities for disabled people in Scotland.

**Ian Murray:**

The UK Government worked with the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to inform the most appropriate mix of UKSPF interventions for Scotland. Under the UKSPF delegated delivery model, local authorities are given the autonomy to make decisions on how funding is spent in their area. Local authorities in Scotland therefore might choose to make place-based investments for regeneration and town centre improvements, which could include better accessibility for disabled people, including capital spend and running costs; as well as providing funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as local attractions, trails, tours and tourism products more generally.

**TRANSPORT****■ Bus Services: Fares**

**Graham Stuart:** [\[9149\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make it her policy to extend the £2 bus fare cap beyond 31 December 2024.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Delivering reliable and affordable public transport services for passengers is one of the government's top priorities as we know how important this is for passengers and for local growth. The Department for Transport is looking at the future of the £2 fare cap as a matter of urgency and is considering the most appropriate and affordable approach for the future of the scheme.

**■ Cars: Motor Insurance**

**Chris Kane:** [\[9648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her Department's policies of recent trends in levels of car insurance premiums.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

This Government committed in its manifesto to tackle the high costs of motor insurance. To deliver on this commitment, the UK Government has formed a cross-government Taskforce on motor insurance, co-chaired by the Department for Transport and His Majesty's Treasury, which met for the first time on 16th October.

The Taskforce is comprised of ministers from relevant government departments and by the Financial Conduct Authority and Competition and Markets Authority. The Taskforce is supported by a separate Stakeholder Panel of industry experts representing the insurance, motor, and consumer sector.

This Taskforce has a strategic remit to set the direction for UK Government policy, identifying short- and long-term actions for departments that may contribute to stabilising or reducing premiums, while maintaining appropriate levels of cover. It will evaluate the impact of increased insurance costs on consumers and the insurance industry, including how this impacts different demographics, geographies, and communities.

## ■ Driving Tests: Applications

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[9223\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the blog post entitled How we're dealing with bots and the reselling of driving tests, published by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency on 29 June 2023, what progress that Agency has made on tackling automated bots exploiting the driving test booking system.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

To ensure fairness for everyone wanting to book a practical driving test, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) continues to work hard to combat the unscrupulous practice of reselling tests.

In January 2023, DVSA changed its booking service terms and conditions to help prevent anyone from selling tests at profit. Since then, the DVSA has issued 313 warnings, 766 suspensions, and closed 705 business accounts for misuse of its booking service.

DVSA operates an online booking service (OBS) for Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) and trainers so that they can book and manage driving and riding tests for their pupils. DVSA has made changes to the OBS by stopping automatic online registrations to use the service, ensuring each company that registers employs an ADI and removing access for any companies not linked to driving instructors.

**Amanda Hack:**

[\[9305\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data her Department holds on the number of driving test bookings where the initial driving licence number on the booking form was subsequently changed in each month since January 2019.

**Amanda Hack:**

[\[9306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data her Department holds on the percentage of driving test bookings where the initial driving licence number on the booking form was subsequently changed in each month since January 2019.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

To ensure fairness for everyone wanting to book a practical driving test, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) continues to work hard to combat the unscrupulous practice of reselling tests.

DVSA is experiencing some of the highest demand for driving tests it has ever seen. This, and continued high waiting times for tests, has contributed to a major shift in customer booking behaviour. Many customers now book their car practical test far earlier in their learning journey, sometimes before they have even had a practical driving lesson.

DVSA does not employ, encourage or licence anyone to provide a cancellation service checking for newly open slots. These apps or bots are not approved by the DVSA as they make it harder for candidates to get a test and can result in people paying more for a test than the official test fee of £62. Using such services also means that any changes to the test may not necessarily be relayed to the candidate.

The attached spreadsheet shows the number and percentage of practical driving test bookings where the initial test candidate's driving licence number was subsequently changed to a different driving test candidate's licence number in each month since January 2019.

**Attachments:**

1. Driving Test Bookings [Copy of Attachment for PQ's 9305 & 9306 driving tests.xlsx]

**■ Driving Tests: Kent****Tristan Osborne:**[\[9585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help reduce driving test waiting times in (a) Medway and (b) Kent.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

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

DVSA continues to take measures to increase test availability. These include the recruitment of driving examiners (DE), conducting tests outside regular hours, including at weekends and on public holidays and buying back annual leave from driving examiners.

As part of its recruitment efforts in Kent, DVSA has made offers to 15 potential new DEs. DVSA launched its latest recruitment campaign in September 2024. From this campaign DVSA aims to recruit a further eight DEs in the Kent area.

**■ Driving under Influence: Drugs****Sir John Hayes:**[\[9128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help reduce the number of people driving while under the influence of illegal drugs.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

This Government takes road safety very seriously and reducing those killed and injured on our roads is a key priority. That is why we have announced our intention to publish a new Road Safety Strategy, the first in over a decade. We will set out next steps on this in due course.

**Euston Station: Advertising****Helen Whately:**[\[8667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions Network Rail has had with JC Decaux on the potential costs of turning off their advertising hoardings at Euston Station.

**Simon Lightwood:**

As key partners, Network Rail speaks with JCDecaux on commercial matters across its railway estate on a weekly basis, or sometimes even more frequently. The loss of revenue is being borne by Network Rail. Network Rail are unable to comment on the financial impact on JCDecaux as the terms of the agreement are commercially sensitive.

**Helen Whately:**[\[8668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate she has made of Network Rail's potential loss of revenue from disabling the advertising board at London Euston station this financial year.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The use of the advertising screen at Euston Station is under review with various options being considered. The potential loss of revenue is commercially confidential.

**Future Mobility Zones Fund****Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[9131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate she had made of when she will receive the results of the evaluation of future transport zones commissioned by her Department from the National Centre for Social Research.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Future Transport Zones (FTZ) programme is scheduled to conclude by the end of 2025. Monitoring and evaluation work has been ongoing alongside the programme since it began in 2020. We have recently published the first two waves of evaluation at a national level, delivered by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Department for Transport, with a third wave to follow in 2025. The individual FTZ areas are also undertaking their own local evaluations.

**■ M25: Repairs and Maintenance****Dr Ben Spencer:****[9575]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the economic impact to businesses and communities in Runnymede and Weybridge constituency of the M25/A3 improvement works.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

National Highways (NH) is delivering a scheme on the M25 junction 10/A3 Wisley interchange and selected surrounding roads to reduce congestion, improve safety, support planned housing and economic growth, and improve provision for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders crossing or using routes in the vicinity of M25 junction 10.

During the economic assessments of this scheme, NH appraised the economic impact of road user delays during construction, as well as the long-term benefits for the whole scheme across the aggregate area. As this did not separate out the assessment by areas, the impact in the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency specifically cannot be quantified.

**■ Parking: Pedestrian Areas****Neil O'Brien:****[9764]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to take steps to (a) allow local authorities with civil parking enforcement powers to enforce against unnecessary obstruction of the pavement and (b) enable highways authorities outside London to introduce a pavement parking prohibition.

**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 in due course at: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-pavement-parking](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-pavement-parking).

**■ Railway Stations: Lifts****Dr Ben Spencer:****[8680]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of lift (a) availability and (b) maintenance and repair at train stations.

**Simon Lightwood:**

This is an operational matter for Network Rail and the train operating companies. Lifts should be available whenever passengers need them, however, there have been many occasions where this has not been the case. Network Rail has been aware of lift and escalator performance issues and established an improvement strategy in October 2023. In March 2024, the independent regulator, the Office of Rail and Road carried out a review into lift performance, which reinforced the need to deliver the

national improvement strategy. Since then, Network Rail has implemented new contracts, invested in strategic spares across the country and reviewed the operating model for delivering lift and escalator asset management.

### ■ Railways: Concessions

**Mr Lee Dillon:**

[\[8605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a discounted railcard for people aged 30 to 60 years old who earn below the average.

**Simon Lightwood:**

There are several Railcards that people aged 30 to 60 are eligible to hold, including the Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount Card that offers 50 per cent off selected rail fares. Affordability of rail travel is one of our key objectives. However, any concessions made to rail fares policy must balance benefits for certain groups against the impacts on taxpayers.

### ■ Road Works: Public Consultation

**Andy MacNae:**

[\[9838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to publish the outcome of her Department's consultation entitled Street works: fines and lane rental surplus funds' consultation, published on 15 January 2024.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department plans to publish the Government's response to the consultation in due course.

### ■ Roads: Ashford

**Sojan Joseph:**

[\[9381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that potholes are fixed promptly in Ashford constituency.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously and is committed to maintaining and renewing the local road network. Kent County Council is the local highway authority for the Ashford constituency, and it is therefore responsible for the maintenance of its local road network. Kent County Council will receive £38.3 million from this Department during 2024/25 to help it carry out its local highway maintenance responsibilities: it is up to it to decide how that funding is used. For England as a whole, the Government has a commitment to enable local highway authorities to fix up to a million more potholes a year.

**■ Roads: Kent****Tristan Osborne:** [\[9586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she had made of the adequacy of the condition of local roads in Kent and Medway.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously and is committed to maintaining and renewing the local road network. Kent County Council and Medway Council are the local highway authorities for different parts of the Chatham and Aylesford constituency, and they are therefore responsible for the condition and maintenance of their local road networks. They will receive £38.3 million and £3.5 million respectively from this Department during 2024/25 to help them carry out their local highway maintenance responsibilities, and it is up to them to decide how that funding is used. For England as a whole, the Government has a commitment to enable local highway authorities to fix up to a million more potholes a year.

**■ Roads: Repairs and Maintenance****Stuart Andrew:** [\[8636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much funding her Department plans to provide for road infrastructure in each of the next three financial years.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Future funding decisions, including for our highway networks, is a matter for the upcoming Budget and Spending Review.

**TREASURY****■ Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage: Finance****Clive Lewis:** [\[8661\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 7485 on Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage: Taxation, if she will hold discussion with carbon capture, usage and storage organisations in receipt of Government funding on (a) the location of their headquarters and (b) their tax status.

**James Murray:**

All the current applicants for government support in Track 1 of the Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage programme are registered in England and Wales. Companies pay Corporation Tax in the UK on their profits derived from economic activities they undertake through a place of business here.



## ■ Debts

**Andrew Cooper:**

[\[9369\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the regional spread of household debt in each of the last three years.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Government fully recognises the profound challenges that debt and financial difficulties have on families and individuals across the country. We are deeply committed to addressing these concerns and improving living standards across the country.

That is why economic growth remains a top priority. If Real Household Disposable Income per capita had grown at the same rate between 2010 and 2023 as it did from 1997 to 2010, it would be over £4,000 higher today.

According to recent data from the Money and Pensions Service, the highest levels of need for debt advice are in constituencies within large cities including London, Bradford and Birmingham. However, there are pockets of high debt advice need in local authority areas in smaller towns and cities.

## ■ Employers' Contributions: Small Businesses

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[9564\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of raising employer's National Insurance Contributions on small and medium-sized businesses.

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[9565\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of raising employer's National Insurance Contributions on the hospitality sector.

**Daisy Cooper:**

[\[9566\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of raising employer's National Insurance Contributions on the social care sector.

**James Murray:**

The government does not speculate on tax changes outside of fiscal events. Where changes are made, information about impacts is published in the usual way.

## ■ Mortgages: Government Assistance

**Claire Hanna:**

[\[8921\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to include support for home owners struggling with mortgage commitments in the Budget.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

This Government recognises that many households have been faced with higher mortgage rates in recent years. That is why we are committed to delivering economic stability to grow the economy and keep taxes, inflation and mortgage rates as low as possible.

The pricing of mortgages is a commercial decision for lenders in which the Government does not intervene. However, there are significant measures in place to protect vulnerable mortgage borrowers. Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) rules require lenders to engage individually with their customers who are struggling or who are worried about their payments, and the Mortgage Charter also remains in place providing additional flexibilities to help customers manage their mortgage payments over a short period.

**■ Pensioners: Tax Rates and Bands****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[9237\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 6585, how much and what proportion of the money accruing to the Treasury as a result of changes to eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment she expects to come from people paying the (a) higher and (b) additional rate income tax.

**Darren Jones:**

The Government does not publish such data.

**■ Private Education: VAT****Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:**[\[9210\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Questions 7840, 7842 and 7843 on Armed Forces: Private Education, whether she has made an estimate of the cost to the public purse of exempting from VAT the fees paid by children educated in private settings through the Continuity of Education Allowance.

**James Murray:**

On 29 July, the Government announced that, as of 1 January 2025, all education services and vocational training provided by a private school in the UK for a charge will be subject to VAT at the standard rate of 20 per cent. This will also apply to the fees paid by parents in receipt of the Continuity of Education Allowance.

Recognising the enormous sacrifices our military families make, the Ministry of Defence provide the Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) to eligible Service Personnel. The government will monitor closely the impact of these policy changes on affected military families and the ongoing Spending Review is the right time to consider any changes to this scheme.

## WALES

### ■ Wales Office

**Charlie Dewhirst:**

[\[9361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what meetings (a) Ministers and (b) her officials have held with external stakeholders since 5 July 2024.

**Jo Stevens:**

Details of Ministers' and senior officials' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK.

Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

### ■ Wales Office: Ministers' Private Offices

**Sir Ashley Fox:**

[\[9284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items this was spent.

**Dame Nia Griffith:**

The Wales Office has not spent any money on new furniture and fittings and other refurbishments to Ministerial private offices since the dissolution of the last Parliament.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### ■ Carers

**Fabian Hamilton:**

[\[8632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to help support unpaid carers.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Unpaid carers play a vital role in supporting elderly or disabled relatives or friends. Sometimes unpaid carers will need to turn to the benefit system for financial support, so it is right that we keep Carer's Allowance under review, to see if it is meeting its objectives, and giving unpaid carers the help and support they need and deserve.

Unpaid carers may be able to receive financial and/or employment support from the department depending on their circumstances. This includes Carer's Allowance and mean tested benefits such as Universal Credit. And those caring for less than 35 hours a week on Universal Credit can receive individualised employment support through their Jobcentre Plus work coach who can tailor work related requirements, such as searching for work, to fit their caring responsibilities so they can combine paid work and unpaid care.

Unpaid carers may continue to be able to receive benefits if they choose to combine their caring responsibilities with paid work, meaning they can increase their overall income (eligibility rules apply).

Carers (providing at least 35 hours per week) of severely disabled people may be eligible for Universal Credit Carer Element and/or Carer's Allowance. They are not required to undertake any work-related activity, but can access employment support on a voluntary basis if they wish.

## ■ Carer's Allowance

**Victoria Collins:** [\[8726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reducing the number of hours of care per week required to qualify for Carer's Allowance.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

It is a long-standing principle, under successive Governments, since Carer's Allowance was introduced, that the threshold for the number of hours spent caring is 35 hours a week.

Unpaid carers play a vital role in supporting elderly or disabled relatives or friends. Sometimes unpaid carers will need to turn to the benefit system for financial support, so it is right that we keep Carer's Allowance under review, to see if it is meeting its objectives, and giving unpaid carers the help and support they need and deserve.

**Victoria Collins:** [\[8957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) increasing the carer's allowance and (b) introducing a taper to ensure unpaid carers are not subject to any removal of benefits.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Secretary of State undertakes a statutory annual review of benefit and pensions, and the value of Carer's Allowance is protected by up-rating it each year in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI).

This Government will keep eligibility criteria and processes of Carer's Allowance under review, to see if it is meeting its objectives.

Introducing a taper in Carer's Allowance would significantly complicate the benefit with awards having to be manually adjusted on a weekly basis for some recipients declaring earnings. This would add to administrative costs and potentially increase fraud and error. Those also receiving Universal Credit would need to have that adjusted if their payment of Carer's Allowance changed because of an earnings taper rate.

A taper could therefore only be introduced following significant changes to the IT system that supports payment of Carer's Allowance.

**Victoria Collins:** [\[8959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of paying carers at national living wage rates.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Many people will care for friends or family members at some point in their life, and it is right that we recognise the vitally important role of unpaid carers. That is why we are expecting to spend around £4.2 billion this year to support them through Carer's Allowance.

The principal purpose of Carer's Allowance is to provide a measure of financial support and recognition for people who are not able to work full-time because of their caring responsibilities. It was never intended to be a carer's wage nor a payment for the services of caring and is, therefore, not comparable with the National Living Wage.

The Secretary of State undertakes a statutory annual review of benefit and pensions, and the level of Carer's Allowance is protected by Up-rating it each year in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI).

In addition to Carer's Allowance, carers on low incomes can claim income-related benefits, such as Universal Credit and Pension Credit. These benefits can be paid to carers at a higher rate than those without caring responsibilities through the carer element and the additional amount for carers respectively.

#### ■ Carer's Allowance: Students

**Victoria Collins:** [\[8727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending eligibility for Carer's Allowance to carers in full-time education.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

This Government recognises and appreciates the vital contribution made by all unpaid carers.

We think it is right that people in full-time education should be supported by the educational maintenance system, rather than the social security benefit system. That is why, as a general principle, full-time students are usually precluded from entitlement to income-related and income-maintenance benefits, including Carer's Allowance. Part-time students may be able to claim Carer's Allowance though. This reflects long-standing principles of the benefit system, and we have no plans to change these rules.

Department for Work and Pensions officials work very closely with their Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care counterparts to ensure that young carers get the help and support they need. I will also be meeting the Carers Trust and the Learning and Work Institute to discuss these issues.

**■ Department for Work and Pensions: Public Appointments****John Glen:****[6121]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what (a) direct ministerial and (b) other public appointments to her Department and associated bodies have (i) been (A) removed from their posts and (B) asked to resign and (ii) made since 4 July 2024.

**Andrew Western:**

(i) The Department does not routinely record and collect the reasons why appointees leave their positions. Additionally, the reasons why an appointee has left their role is the appointee's personal information and identifiable and would elicit GDPR considerations.

(ii) Public appointments are routinely published on gov.uk. and in addition to the answer given to PQ [2389](#) the following have been made since 4 July 2024:

- Taalib Shaah was appointed on the 12 August 2024 as a Non-Executive Director. The details of the appointment was published on direct.gov.uk on the 8 October: [Taalib Shaah - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).
- Andrew Tarrant was appointed via Direct Ministerial Appointment on the 9th September 2024 as a Pensions Expert Advisor.

**■ Department for Work and Pensions: Terminology****Neil Coyle:****[9183]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will review her Department's use of the term customer for claimants.

**Andrew Western:**

The department keeps its policies and procedures under regular review, including how it communicates with users of its services.

**■ Disability: Fuel Poverty****Jim Shannon:****[8645]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of rises in energy costs on disabled people who use electronic aids and adaptations at home during Winter 2024-25.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

We understand that energy bills are a concern for many people. We believe the only way to protect bill payers permanently, including disabled people, is to accelerate the green transition towards homegrown, clean energy.

This Government is committed to championing the rights of disabled people and working with them so that their views and voices are at the heart of everything we do.

We know disabled people face extra costs every day and this has been exacerbated by the increased cost of living. Ministers and officials have met with disabled

stakeholders to discuss the impact of high energy costs for disabled people, including those who use electronic aids and adaptations in the home.

We also expect energy suppliers to do everything they can to support customers who are struggling with their bills, especially vulnerable households such as those with individuals who are disabled. We encourage any vulnerable consumer who needs extra support to sign up to the Priority Services Register.

### ■ **Disability: Human Rights**

**Richard Foord:**

[\[9581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with the reference to the UN Inquiry into the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the UK, published in October 2016, what steps she is taking to help protect the human rights of disabled people.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

This government is committed to boosting opportunity and protecting the rights of disabled people. We will work closely with disabled people and their representative organisations to ensure that their needs and voices are at the heart of everything we do.

As a first step, our Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will enshrine in law the full right to equal pay for disabled people and disability pay gap reporting for large employers.

### ■ **Mental Health: First Aid**

**James McMurdock:**

[\[9089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to increase the provision of mental health first aid training.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for the Health and Safety (First-Aid Regulations) 1981, which require employers to undertake a first aid needs assessment including both mental and physical health risks, and to ensure there is suitable provision to meet the needs identified for their workplace.

HSE has published a range of guidance on its website to support employers in carrying out their first aid needs assessment, and there is established guidance on appropriate first aid provision for employees requiring immediate intervention or support until professional emergency care can be accessed.

### ■ **Pension Credit**

**Richard Burgon:**

[\[8652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of additional people that will register for Pension Credit between 1 September and 31 December 2024.

**Emma Reynolds:**

No such estimate has been made.

For Pension Credit claims received up to 22 September 2024, the following report contains weekly figures: [Weekly Pension Credit claims received from 1 April 2024 to 22 September 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/weekly-pension-credit-claims-received-from-1-april-2024-to-22-september-2024)

**Richard Burgon:** [8653]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the number of people who will be entitled to Pension Credit but will have not registered by (a) 31 December 2024 and (b) 1 April 2025.

**Emma Reynolds:**

No such estimate has been made.

Estimates for pensioner households who are eligible for but not receiving Pension Credit in 2022/23 can be found at: [Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year ending 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/income-related-benefits-estimates-of-take-up-financial-year-ending-2023)

**Richard Burgon:** [8654]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to write to every person entitled to but not claiming Pension Credit.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Starting this month pensioners in England and Wales will receive a letter informing them of the change in eligibility to the Winter Fuel Payment and encouraging them to check their eligibility for Pension Credit. Similar letters to pensioners in Scotland and Northern Ireland will follow during November.

In November we will also be writing to approximately 120,000 pensioners who are in receipt of Housing Benefit and who may also be eligible for, but not currently claiming, Pension Credit. We will be inviting these pensioners to claim Pension Credit by the 21 December, which is the latest date for making a successful backdated Pension Credit claim and still qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment.

**Dr Luke Evans:** [9224]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 11 September 2024 to Question 5385 on Pension Credit, how much extra funding her Department has secured for additional staffing to improve processing times.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The details of the departmental budgets for 24/25 and 25/26 will be agreed through the Spending Review. This will include details of funding to support Pension Credit claims.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:** [9463]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average Pension Credit processing time is (a) per month in the latest three-month period for which data is available and (b) in each region.



**Emma Reynolds:**

Average actual clearance times are shown in the table below from 3 June 2024.

Please note, the information is not available monthly.

The table below shows the average (in working days) for each week.

SOURCE	RS PBI APP / PC CLAIMS AACT
03/06/24	45
10/06/24	44
17/06/24	43
24/06/24	44
01/07/24	44
08/07/24	45
15/07/24	48
22/07/24	44
29/07/24	45
05/08/24	40
12/08/24	39
19/08/24	36
26/08/24	31
02/09/24	29
09/09/24	30
16/09/24	28
23/09/24	26
30/09/24	34
07/10/24	39

Please note, the data shown is unpublished management information, collected and intended for internal departmental use and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard.

The information requested is not collected at regional level and to calculate it would incur disproportionate cost.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:** [9465]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many Pension Credit applications her Department received in each region in each of the last three months for which data is available.

**Emma Reynolds:**

We confirm that we do not hold the information you have requested as our systems do not breakdown Pension Credit applications by region.

#### ■ Pension Credit: Appeals

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:** [9464]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of claimants for Pension Credit were (a) initially turned down and (b) successful on appeal in each region in the latest period for which data is available.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The information requested on the proportion of Pension Credit claims which are initially turned down but are subsequently overturned at Tribunal is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Information on appeals in the First-tier Tribunal, including Pension Credit appeals, is published at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics)

Specifically, information on the number of appeal receipts, disposals and outcomes of Pension Credit appeals can be found in the Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) tables: SSCS\_1, SSCS\_2 and SSCS\_3 of the Main Tables.

#### ■ Pension Credit: Applications

**Clive Lewis:** [8663]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 11 September 2024 to Question 3732 on Pension Credit: Applications, how the Service Modernisation Programme will make service more user friendly and accessible for citizens; and what her planned timeline is for making those changes.

**Emma Reynolds:**

We continuously improve and iterate the Pension Credit application service to make the service more user friendly and accessible for citizens. New features are released regularly to the service in line with user research and feedback on the service from citizens and colleagues and in line with the Pension Credit policy.

#### ■ Pension Credit: Publicity

**Richard Burgon:** [8655]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much her Department spends on publicity to increase the number of people registered for Pension Credit.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The Department's current paid marketing activity to promote Pension Credit which includes radio, national and regional press, paid social media and GP and Post Office screens, has been live since 16<sup>th</sup> September and is ongoing. It is not possible to provide an accurate cost for this paid activity until it is concluded.

**Personal Independence Payment****Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[\[8747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of Personal Independence Payments at supporting the extra costs of disability.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) provides a contribution to the extra costs that may arise from a disability or health condition. There is no objective way of deciding what an adequate level of PIP should be, as everyone has different requirements reflecting their own circumstances and priorities.

PIP is a non-contributory, non-means-tested, additional cost benefit and can be worth over £9,500 a year, tax free. Individuals can choose how to use the benefit, in the light of their individual needs and preferences. The benefit can also be paid in addition to any other financial or practical support someone may be entitled to such as Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, NHS services, free prescriptions, help with travel costs to appointments or the Blue Badge scheme. The benefits have been consistently uprated in line with inflation since they were introduced and were, like other benefits, increased by 6.7% from 8 April 2024.

DWP pays close attention to the evidence base on the extra costs faced by disabled people; including academic research, analysis by Scope, and DWP's own commissioned research on the Uses of Health and Disability Benefits from 2019. In order to understand more, DWP is now undertaking a new survey of Personal Independence Payment customers to understand more about their disability related needs. This project has an advisory group of experts including representatives of the disability charity Scope and academic experts.

**Personal Independence Payment: Disability****James McMurdock:**[\[9082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support disabled claimants through the Personal Independence Payment review process.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

We recognise the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) review process can be unsettling for some claimants. There are a number of ways in which we provide support:

In order to speed up the review process, DWP Case Managers can now undertake PIP reviews in-house, removing the need for a consultation, in cases where sufficient

evidence is provided by the claimant. This takes away the stress of a consultation and enables a decision to be made more quickly for the majority of claimants.

For those cases that do need to be reviewed by a Healthcare Professional, different types of assessment types are available depending on claimant circumstances. Providers can offer telephony, video or face-to-face assessments or reviews can again be undertaken, in some cases, using information provided without the need for a consultation.

For claimants who have severe mental health or cognitive impairments we apply an Additional Support marker to the case which protects the claimant from falling out of payment where they struggle to complete forms or engage in the process. This means that the case will progress to a review even where a review form cannot be completed.

Where there are delays for claimants awaiting a review of their PIP award, we have taken steps to keep claimants informed and updated via text messages. In such cases, we routinely extend awards to ensure continuity of payments, enabling claimants (where appropriate) to retain eligibility for Motability vehicles and Blue Badges.

To help claimants understand the process, information is provided on Gov.UK, which also includes the telephone number to call if more time is needed to complete the review form. This can be found at [Personal Independence Payment \(PIP\): If your PIP claim is reviewed - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/personal-independence-payment-PIP-if-your-PIP-claim-is-reviewed). Gov.UK also signposts claimants to information from Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) about what claimants need to include when completing the PIP review form. Further details can be found at [Help with your PIP review form - Citizens Advice](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/mental-health/mental-health-benefits/PIP/PIP-review-form/).

#### ■ Social Security Benefits: Disability

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[8748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to work with (a) disabled people and (b) disabled people's organisations to improve disabled people's experiences of the benefits system.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 14 October to PQs [7651](#) and [6447](#).

#### ■ Social Security Benefits: Undocumented Migrants

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[9302\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department has taken to prevent illegal immigrants claiming benefits.

**Andrew Western:**

All benefits claimants have to verify their identity before they can receive payments. For any claimants who aren't British or Irish, we verify that they have a valid UK immigration status. Illegal immigrants cannot access taxpayer-funded benefits

(publicly funded benefits), including Universal Credit or Personal Independence Payment. In order to receive such benefits, an individual must either be a British or Irish citizen or hold an immigration status that allows them to access such benefits. Whether someone holds a valid immigration status or is a British or Irish citizen is tested through DWP residency tests and verified through information from the Home Office.

For DWP benefits that do not require a valid immigration status (contributory benefits), such as New-Style Jobseeker's Allowance and Statutory Sick Pay, claimants will need to satisfy other eligibility criteria, such as having employment periods and paid sufficient national insurance contributions. To have been employed to meet the contributory benefits criteria, a valid National Insurance number is required, meaning the identity and immigration status of the claimant has been verified.

## ■ State Retirement Pensions: Wales

**Ann Davies:**

**[9596]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in Wales are recipients of the (a) old and (b) new State Pension; and how many and what proportion of those recipients receive the full rate of the (i) old and (ii) new State Pension in the latest period for which data is available.

**Emma Reynolds:**

It is not possible to make direct, like for like comparisons between State Pension amounts received under the pre 2016 State Pension system and the new State Pension. Under both systems, the amount people are entitled to varies according to their National Insurance record. In addition to the basic State Pension, people on the pre 2016 system may also receive some earnings-related additional State Pension and/or Graduated Retirement Benefit

As of the quarter ending May 2023, the number of people in Wales who were the recipients of the:

a) Basic State Pension (BSP) was 458,382.

b) New State Pension (nSP) was 177,404.

The number of those recipients as of the end of May 2023 who received the full rate of the:

i) Basic State Pension was 377,303. This is 82% of the people in receipt of the BSP.

ii) New State Pension was 93,153. This is 53% of the people in receipt of the nSP.

This data is available on Stat-Xplore at <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk> in the 'State Pension - Data from May 2018' dataset. Quarter ending May 2023 is the latest available data, due to data processing issues with the Get Your State Pension service. More information is available in the [Background information note: DWP benefits statistical summaries.](#)

More information on the data included in the 'State Pension' dataset can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dwp-statistical-summaries>.

Guidance on how to use Stat-Xplore can be found here: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/index.html>. An account is not required to use Stat- Xplore, the 'Guest Login' feature gives instant access to the main functions.

## ■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

**Sir John Hayes:**

**[8760]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an estimate of the number of women affected by the changes to the State Pension age in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

**Emma Reynolds:**

All women born since 6 Apr 1950 have been affected by changes to State Pension age, through changes brought in by the Pensions Acts 1995, 2007, 2011 and 2014. As State Pension age is now the same for men and women, following equalisation, all men born since the 6 Dec 1953 have also been affected by changes to State Pension age, through the 2007, 2011 and 2014 Pensions Acts. The oldest of the women affected by changes to State Pension age would now be 74 years old, the oldest of the men affected by changes to State Pension age would now be 70 years old.

ONS population estimates suggest that in mid 2023 there were 43,216 females aged 74 or below currently resident in the South Hollands and the Deepings constituency, and 345,713 females resident in Lincolnshire aged 74 or below, who have been impacted by State Pension age increases to 65 and 66.

Future State Pension age changes are set out on gov.uk, but are subject to confirmation as part of periodic reviews of State Pension age.

## ■ Universal Credit

**Mrs Sarah Russell:**

**[9047]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Universal Credit minimum income threshold on trends in the level of childminder (a) recruitment and (b) retention, in the context of recent changes to free childcare allowances.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

There is no plan to assess the potential impact of the Minimum Income Floor specifically for self-employed childminders on Universal Credit.

The department does not systematically collect data about the sector self-employed customers work in. Universal Credit treats all forms and sectors of self-employment in the same way, focusing on the level of the customer's earnings rather than the sector. There is no link between the sector that a customer works in and the level of their Minimum Income Floor.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:**

[\[9461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when she plans to launch her Department's review of Universal Credit.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

We are committed to reviewing Universal Credit, to make sure it is doing the job we want it to. We will set out the details of this in due course.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:**

[\[9462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department's review of Universal Credit will include the income threshold used to determine eligibility for (a) free school meals and (b) the NHS Healthy Start scheme.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Eligibility criteria, including earnings thresholds for passported benefits including Free School Meals and Healthy Start payments are owned by Department of Education and the Department of Health and Social care respectively.

## ■ Winter Fuel Payment

**Ian Lavery:**

[\[9177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of means-testing the winter fuel payment on trends in the level of excess deaths in winter.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[9337\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of the decision to means test the winter fuel payment on the expected number of excess deaths in winter 2024-25.

**Ayoub Khan:**

[\[9355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of the decision to means test the winter fuel payment on the expected number of excess deaths in winter 2024-25.

**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. We will do this through protecting the triple lock, keeping energy bills low through our Warm Homes Plan, and bringing real stability to people's lives.

However, given the substantial pressures faced by the public finances this year and next, the Government has had to make hard choices to bring the public finances back under control.

The Government is committed to a preventative approach to public health. Keeping people warm and well at home and improving the quality of new and existing homes

will play an essential part in enabling people to live longer, healthier lives and reducing pressures on the NHS.

The Household Support Fund (HSF) 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 HSF in England, plus funding for the Devolved Governments through the Barnett formula to be spent at their discretion, as usual.

We are supporting consumers, including pensioners, through our Warm Homes Plan which will transform homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to run. The Warm Homes Plan will offer grants and low interest loans to support investment in insulation, low carbon heating and other home improvements to cut bills.

Additionally, there are multiple targeted schemes in place to deliver energy efficiency measures to low income and fuel poor households. Schemes include the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) and the Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS).

Pensioners if eligible may also receive the Warm Home Discount which provides a £150 annual rebate off energy bills for eligible low-income households until 2025/26.

Guidance to help people stay safe in cold weather has been published by UKHSA. This will help ensure that organisations and staff are prompted to signpost those vulnerable to cold weather to sources of support for keeping their home warm, with cost of living support, including help to manage energy bills, as needed. As well as advice on simple measures to improve home energy efficiency and safety to reduce risks that may increase in cold weather (for example from carbon monoxide exposure).

Details of excess winter deaths in England and Wales can be found at: [Winter mortality in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandlife/articles/wintermortalityinenglandandwales-2022-23/2022-09-27).

**Stuart Anderson:**

**[9556]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the potential health impacts of means-testing the winter fuel payment.

**Emma Reynolds:**

No such discussions took place.

The Government is committed to a preventative approach to public health. Keeping people warm and well at home and improving the quality of new and existing homes will play an essential part in enabling people to live longer, healthier lives and reducing pressures on the NHS.

The UK Health Security Agency publishes the Adverse Weather and Health Plan for England, which sets out a framework for action to protect the population from harm to their health from adverse weather including excess cold and outlines the health risks of cold homes.



Each year the NHS makes robust plans for expected winter pressures. It is important that NHS trusts and local authorities take a joined-up approach to winter planning across the health and care system. NHS England and DHSC wrote to local authorities and NHS trusts on 16 September to set out a national approach to 2024/25 winter planning, and the key steps to be taken to support the delivery of high-quality care for patients this winter.

## ■ Winter Fuel Payment: South Basildon and East Thurrock

**James McMurdock:**

[9080]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people receiving a state pension are no longer eligible for the winter fuel allowance in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

**Emma Reynolds:**

It is estimated that around 15,200 pensioners in South Basildon and East Thurrock Constituency (2024 boundaries) will be affected by the decision to amend the eligibility criteria for the Winter Fuel Payment. This is based on February 2024 Pension Credit statistics which are available via [DWP Stat-Xplore](#) and the [Winter Fuel Payment statistics for winter 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

This estimation is calculated by subtracting the number of people claiming Pension Credit in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency from the number of Winter Fuel Payment recipients in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency. It is possible to use the Pension Credit statistics, to give a minimum estimate of the number who may be eligible for Winter Fuel Payments. Therefore, the above estimation is essentially the number of Winter Fuel Payment recipients who are not claiming Pension Credit pre-policy change, as an estimate of those who will no longer receive the Winter Fuel Payment.

Please note that the above estimation would not take into account any potential increase in Pension Credit take-up that 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.

The published Pension Credit figures refer to households, so the number of individuals in respect of whom Pension Credit is paid will be higher (i.e. taking account of households where a claimant has a partner and/or dependents).

In addition, while Pension Credit claimants constitute the majority of those that will be eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment, pensioners who claim other qualifying means-tested benefits will also be eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment. It is not, however, possible to include those on other qualifying means-tested benefits in these figures.

**■ Winter Fuel Payment: Veterans****Helen Maguire:**[\[9654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an estimate of the number of armed forces veterans who will no longer be eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment as a result of proposed changes to eligibility criteria.

**Emma Reynolds:**

We have made no such estimate and are not able to do so as we do not collect specific data on veterans over pension age receiving benefits and pensions.

Winter Fuel Payments will continue to be paid to pensioner households with someone receiving Pension Credit or certain other income-related benefits. They will continue to be worth £200 for eligible households, or £300 for eligible households with someone aged 80 and over.

This means that the Winter Fuel Payment will be better targeted to low-income pensioners who need it. The UK Government wants those eligible for Pension Credit but not currently claiming it to receive the benefits they are entitled to, including their Winter Fuel Payment.

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Making Work Pay: Consultation Package

**Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds):** [\[HCWS146\]](#)

The Government's Plan to Make Work Pay is a core part of our mission to grow the economy, raise living standards across the country and create opportunities for all. It will tackle the low pay, poor working conditions and poor job security that has been holding our economy back. The landmark Employment Rights Bill will benefit more than ten million workers in every corner of the country.

We have committed to working with all stakeholders on how to best put these measures into practice. As trailed in the Government's *Next Steps to Make Work Pay* document (published 10 October), the Deputy Prime Minister, Work and Pensions Secretary and I are today launching four 6-week consultations. Subject to the outcome of these consultations, we will consider whether there is a need for any Government amendments to the Employment Rights Bill.

#### **Consultation 1: The application of zero hours contracts measures to agency workers**

The Employment Rights Bill includes measures to deliver our commitments to end exploitative zero hours contracts by introducing:

1. A right to a contract with guaranteed hours that reflects the number of hours regularly worked, based on a twelve-week reference period; and
1. A right to reasonable notice of shifts, and proportionate payment for short notice shift cancellations and curtailment.

The Government believes that all workers – including agency workers – should have the right to guaranteed hours which reflect the hours they regularly work. The Government's intention is that agency workers should also have a right to reasonable notice of shifts and receive payment for shifts that are cancelled or curtailed at short notice. The unique tripartite relationship between agency workers, employment agencies and hirers makes the application of these measures to them particularly complex. The zero hours contract measures create new responsibilities for employers. For agency workers we need to decide whether these responsibilities sit with the employment agency, the end hirer, or both. The first consultation being launched today seeks to understand how these measures can best apply to agency workers.

#### **Consultation 2: Creating a modern framework for industrial relations**

The Government is committed to a new partnership approach of cooperation and negotiation that sees employers and trade unions working with government to tackle the challenges affecting our economy. Workplaces and working practices have changed significantly over the last decade and trade union legislation which underpins industrial

relations is in need of modernisation. Poor industrial relations have held the UK back from reaching its potential. In 2022, 2.5 million working days were lost due to strikes in the UK. In 2023 it was close to 2.7 million; the most in any year since 1989.

We are committed to developing a framework for industrial relations that will stand the test of time. This consultation is taking those first steps forward, to help us build positive, modern framework for our industrial relations.

The Government is seeking views on a number of changes to modernise and hardwire negotiation, engagement and dispute resolution into industrial relations. The consultation includes proposals on simplifying the amount of information unions are required to provide in industrial action notices, strengthening provisions to prevent unfair practices during the trade union recognition process, securing a mandate for negotiation and dispute resolution, requirements on political funds, extending the expiry of the strike mandate, reducing the industrial action notice period, updating the law on repudiation and prior call, and seeking views on the enforcement mechanism for right of access.

**Consultation 3: Strengthening remedies against abuse of rules on collective redundancy and fire and rehire** The Employment Rights Bill expands protections for employees in fire and rehire and collective redundancy scenarios. It does this by banning fire and rehire practices other than when the employer genuinely has no alternative and by ensuring the right to collective consultation is determined by the number of people impacted across the entire business, rather than in one workplace.

The Government is also committed to reforming the law to provide effective remedies against abuse of the rules on fire and rehire and collective redundancy. The third consultation being launched today seeks views on doing that by increasing the maximum period for the protective award for scenarios where employers haven't complied with their collective redundancy obligations, and adding interim relief to collective redundancies and unfair dismissals in fire and re-hire scenarios. **Consultation 4: Strengthening Statutory Sick Pay**

The Employment Rights Bill includes measures to strengthen Statutory Sick Pay for those who need it most, by removing the existing requirements to serve waiting days and extending eligibility to those earning below the Lower Earnings Limit. The Department for Work and Pensions is therefore launching a consultation to support this ambition, and ensure that the safety net of sick pay is available for those who need it most.

The changes introduced within the Bill will mean that for some lower earners, including those earning below the Lower Earnings Limit, their rate of Statutory Sick Pay will be calculated as a percentage of their earnings instead of the flat weekly rate. This consultation is seeking views on what this percentage should be, to ensure it provides a fair earnings replacement when these employees need to take time off work. A copy of the relevant Equality Impact Assessment will be deposited in the Libraries of the House once available.

### Next Steps for consultation

This package represents the first phase of formal consultations on how best to put our plans into practice.

As is typical with employment legislation, further detail on many of the policies in the Employment Rights Bill will be provided through regulations, and in some cases codes of practice, after Royal Assent. We expect to begin further consultations on these reforms in 2025, seeking significant input from all stakeholders, and anticipate most reforms will take effect no earlier than 2026.

As outlined in *Next Steps to Make Work Pay*, there are also commitments in the Plan to Make Work Pay that we will deliver via existing powers and non-legislative routes, as well as those which will take longer to undertake and implement. We will begin consulting on some of these measures before the end of the year, including launching a Call for Evidence on tightening the ban on unpaid internships. The Government continues to work closely with stakeholders to ensure they can plan their contributions to calls for evidence and consultations as they arise.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ 10 Year Health Plan: Building a health service fit for the future

**Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting):**

[\[HCWS147\]](#)

Our NHS is broken, but not beaten, and we have made it our mission to fix the NHS. But we cannot do it without the help of the people who use it, and so today I am launching *Change NHS: A health service fit for the future*: a national conversation to develop the 10-Year Health Plan. This is the next chapter of the NHS' story and how we will make it fit for the future.

One of my first acts as Secretary of State was to commission an immediate investigation into the performance of the NHS in England, to start an open and honest conversation about the state of our health service and the reforms needed to ensure its longevity, and that it is fit for the future.

On 12 September, Lord Darzi published his independent review, which revealed the scale of the challenge we face. Our NHS is under rising pressure; we are diagnosing ill health too late and not doing enough to prevent it in the first place. It is too hard for people to get an appointment, hospitals are overcrowded, NHS workers are overstretched and costs are escalating.

I am determined to reverse record levels of public dissatisfaction with the NHS and deliver a health service that is there for everyone who needs it. We have already taken important steps, starting with plans to fix the front door of the NHS by providing funding to support the recruitment of an additional 1,000 GPs by the end of the financial year and settling the pay dispute with Resident Doctors.

For decades, there has been broad consensus that to overcome the challenges facing the NHS, we must focus on providing more care in the community, so hospitals are able

to treat the sickest patients, make better use of technology, and do more to prevent ill health. Despite this consensus, successive governments have failed to deliver.

We need a different approach to make these crucial shifts and deliver an NHS fit for the future. I want the public and staff to be at the centre of reimagining the NHS, as well as experts from across the health and care landscape. The best ideas are not going to come from above. They have to come from all of us. So, from today, everyone can provide their experience and views at [change.nhs.uk](https://change.nhs.uk) to help us fix our broken NHS.

## TREASURY

### ■ Regulation of Buy-Now, Pay-Later Products

**The Economic Secretary to Treasury (Tulip Siddiq):**

**[[HCWS145](#)]**

Buy-Now, Pay-Later (BNPL) products have seen increasing use amongst many UK consumers, helping some to manage unexpected costs. In the 6 months to January 2023, the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) Financial Lives Survey reported that 14 million consumers used BNPL products.

When provided in a responsible manner, BNPL can provide a useful and affordable source of credit. However, as identified by the 2021 Woolard Review, it also has risks. For example, BNPL firms are not required to comply with the provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 (CCA); and BNPL firms solely offering these types of agreements do not need to adhere to the FCA rules that apply to other consumer credit products. The government is therefore concerned that consumers using BNPL do not have access to key protections.

On 17 October, the government published a consultation setting out its plans to fix this by bringing the sector into regulation. The consultation will be open for six weeks until 29 November.

The government's approach has been informed by five key principles:

- Consumers must have access to simple, clear, understandable and accessible information;
- consumers should have protection when things go wrong;
- consumers should only be lent to if it is affordable;
- regulation should be proportionate so that consumers have continued access and choice; and
- regulation must be introduced urgently to ensure consumers are protected and the sector has certainty. Once implemented, the government's proposals will deliver on these principles.

Under the proposals, BNPL firms will need to be authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority and will be subject to ongoing supervision. The FCA will be able to set appropriate rules on assessing affordability and creditworthiness, reducing the risk that borrowing is unaffordable. They will also be able to set rules on how firms should resolve

complaints, including allowing consumers to take complaints to the independent Financial Ombudsman Service.

Consumers will have access to key legal rights, such as section 75, which will make it quicker and easier for consumers to get refunds.

The government is also proposing to disapply certain information requirements in the Consumer Credit Act 1974 which, if applied to BNPL, could lead to poor consumer outcomes. Instead, the FCA will be able to utilise their powers to apply more appropriate disclosure requirements in its rulebook. This will ensure consumers can actively engage with the information firms provide, allowing them to make informed decisions before entering into a BNPL agreement, throughout the duration of the agreement, and especially when they encounter financial difficulty.

Given the need to act urgently — and because HM Treasury has already undertaken previous consultations on this topic — this consultation will be shortened to 6 weeks. After reviewing feedback, the government will bring forward legislation as soon as possible. The new regime will come into force 12 months after the legislation is made, once the FCA has finalised its detailed rules. The consultation is available on gov.uk.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulation-of-buy-now-pay-later-consultation-on-draft-legislation-october-2024>