



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 31 October 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:30 P.M., 31 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

## ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ **Attorney General: Ministers' Private Offices****Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[9604\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, 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.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Following the dissolution of the last Parliament on 30 May 2024 and before the General Election on 4 July 2024, and prior to the appointment of the Attorney General and I, officials in the Attorney General's Office arranged for the two ministerial offices to be modestly refurbished. The refurbishment was completed on 30 June 2024 and the costs are set out below.

DESCRIPTION	COST
Painting and decorating	£3,510.95
Replacement of carpet tiles	£6,448.51
IT monitor	£151.00

■ **Domestic Abuse: Prosecutions****Andrew Cooper:**[\[11443\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, what steps she is taking to increase the number of prosecutions for domestic violence; and what steps she plans to take with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure that victims of domestic violence receive appropriate support to (a) navigate and (b) have confidence in the criminal justice system.

**Sarah Sackman:**

Strengthening the criminal justice system response to domestic abuse and increasing victim confidence are crucial to achieving this Government's ambitious commitment to halve violence against women and girls this decade.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) takes prosecuting domestic abuse very seriously and maintains a steady charge rate of over 75% and a conviction rate of approximately 76%.

Next month, in partnership with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the CPS will publish a national joint justice plan to transform how cases of domestic abuse are prosecuted and handled. The plan recognises that better communication between the CPS and NPCC improves case outcomes for victims. Additionally, through its Victim

Transformation Programme the CPS is improving the service it provides to victims of crime.

The Ministry of Justice provides funding to Police and Crime Commissioners who commission community-based support services for domestic abuse victims and Independent Domestic Violence Advisors. The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 (Act) aims to improve support for victims of domestic abuse by placing a duty on local commissioners in England to collaborate when commissioning services for victims of domestic abuse. The duty will require commissioners to assess the needs of victims of domestic abuse in their area and produce a joint local commissioning strategy. The Act will also improve awareness of and compliance with the Victims' Code, which supports victims of crime to understand what they can expect from the criminal justice system and sets out the minimum level of service that victims should receive.

The Home Office will also ensure that there are specialist rape and sexual offences teams in every police force and police officers receive stronger training on racism and violence against women and girls.

## BUSINESS AND TRADE

### ■ Department for Business and Trade: Aviation

**Rupert Lowe:**

[11727]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much his Department spent on first class flights in each year since its creation.

**Justin Madders:**

Since its creation on 7 February 2023 and up until 31 March 2024, the Department for Business and Trade has incurred no first-class air travel expenditure as it is not permitted under the travel policy.

### ■ Department for Business and Trade: Buildings

**Sir Ashley Fox:**

[9607]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many and what proportion of desks were occupied in each of his Department's offices in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available; and how many staff attended each office in person in the same period.

**Justin Madders:**

Heads of Department have agreed that 60% minimum office attendance for most staff continues to be the best balance of working for the Civil Service. Office occupancy data for the period July - September has been published today, with further publications to now happen on a quarterly basis. The data is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-hq-occupancy-data>

**■ Drugs: Licensing****Jim Shannon:** [\[10999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department supports the use of Compulsory Licences to gain access to medicines (a) generally and (b) by Columbia for access to dolutegravir.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The Government supports the Doha Declaration on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and Public Health and, within that, a country's right to use compulsory licensing, where necessary and appropriate, to achieve public health policy objectives in the case of national health emergencies. We are aware of the potential impact such initiatives may have on access to medicines, market dynamics, and innovation. We are closely following the process undertaken by Colombia and are in regular dialogue with them on this and other regulatory matters.

**■ Employment Rights Bill****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[11285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, for how many hours he has discussed the Employment Rights Bill with trade unions since 5 July 2024.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[11286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, for how many hours he has discussed the Employment Rights Bill with businesses since 5 July 2024.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[11287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with (a) how many and (b) which businesses he has met to discuss the Employment Rights Bill before its First Reading.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[11288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with (a) how many and (b) which trade unions he has met to discuss the Employment Rights Bill before its First Reading.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[11289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, for how many hours officials in his Department have discussed the Employment Rights Bill with businesses since 5 July 2024.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[11290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, for how many hours officials in his Department have discussed the Employment Rights Bill with trade unions since 5 July 2024.



**Justin Madders:**

Since July, the Department for Business and Trade has undertaken an extensive programme of engagement around the Employment Rights Bill and broader Plan to Make Work Pay.

Such engagement has been underpinned by a strong commitment to working in partnership with businesses and trade unions to ensure policy is firmly pro-business and pro-worker.

This approach to engagement has received praise from businesses and trade unions alike and will continue throughout and beyond the passage of the Employment Rights Bill.

Details of Senior Officials' and Ministers' meetings with external organisations and individuals are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK.

**Internet: Fees and Charges****Graeme Downie:**[\[10230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has plans to bring forward proposals to make it easier to cancel online subscriptions.

**Justin Madders:**

The Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 introduces new rules to protect consumers from being trapped in unwanted subscription contracts, including a requirement for traders to provide straightforward ways for consumers to end contracts. The Government will be consulting later this year on proposals to inform the secondary legislation required to implement the regime.

**Political Levy****John Glen:**[\[11267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 30 July 2024 to Question 1206 on Political Levy, whether trade unions will be required to inform members of the right to opt-out (a) on membership forms and (b) in yearly membership renewals.

**Justin Madders:**

The Employment Rights Bill substantively restores the position on political fund contributions to before the passage of the Trade Union Act 2016. This will mean trade union members will automatically be opted-in to contribute to a political fund, unless they expressly opt-out. We are proposing existing trade union members who did not opt-in to the political fund post 2016 would remain opted-out, and therefore we do not expect there to be any impact on these members.

**John Glen:**[\[11268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 30 July 2024 to Question 1206 on Political Levy, what assessment he has made of the potential

impact of the Employment Rights Bill on trade union members that have not previously opted-in to a political levy but that have also not actively opted-out.

**Justin Madders:**

The Employment Rights Bill substantively restores the position on political fund contributions to before the passage of the Trade Union Act 2016. This will mean trade union members will automatically be opted-in to contribute to a political fund, unless they expressly opt-out. We are proposing existing trade union members who did not opt-in to the political fund post 2016 would remain opted-out, and therefore we do not expect there to be any impact on these members.

■ **Product Regulation and Metrology Bill (HL)**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[11292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the Second Report of Session 2024-25 of the House of Lords Constitution Committee on Product Regulation and Metrology Bill, HL 24, published on 18 October 2024.

**Justin Madders:**

The Department for Business and Trade is grateful for the Select Committee's observations. The Committee's concerns about the use of delegated powers in the Bill were also raised by the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee in its report of 15 October

The Government responded to that report on 28 October and will respond to the Constitution Committee in due course.

■ **Trade Agreements: Egypt**

**Ms Stella Creasy:**

[\[11252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what work the UK- Egypt Subcommittee of the Association Committee on Trade and Investment is undertaking; and when that committee will meet next.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The UK-Egypt Trade and Investment Subcommittee is a forum for promoting further trade and investment between our two countries, and the inaugural meeting was held on 18 July 2023.

At this meeting, market access issues, including ongoing regulatory collaboration in areas of shared priority and interest, such as renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, and financial services, were discussed.

The Subcommittee meets as circumstances require and officials in the UK and Egypt work together on an ongoing basis on trade and investment issues.

## ■ Trade Agreements: Parliamentary Scrutiny

**Clive Jones:**

[11149]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 17 October 2024 to Question 8571 on Trade Agreements: Parliamentary Scrutiny, what options he is considering for wider scrutiny arrangements for trade agreements.

**Mr Douglas Alexander:**

The Government is considering all aspects of this issue. All arrangements must be proportionate and in line with the UK's overarching constitutional framework. We need to balance effective parliamentary scrutiny whilst still ensuring the Government can negotiate effectively in the UK's best interest.

## CABINET OFFICE

### ■ 10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection

**Nick Timothy:**

[8943]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 31 July 2024 to question 1252 on 10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection, if he will publish a list of all art work, including reference numbers from (a) the Government Art Collection and (b) his Department's own collection that are on display within the offices of No.10 Downing Street; and whether any such art is on display in the Prime Minister's personal residence.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Government Art Collection website lists the artworks on display in Downing Street

[https://artcollection.dcms.gov.uk/?s=&display=artworkonly&search\\_place=Downing+Street](https://artcollection.dcms.gov.uk/?s=&display=artworkonly&search_place=Downing+Street). There are currently no Government Art Collection pieces in the Prime Minister's official residence.

There have been no changes to displayed artworks owned by the Cabinet Office since July 4, 2024.

### ■ Admiralty House

**John Glen:**

[10703]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 11 September 2024 to Question 2633 on Admiralty House, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) renting out the empty flats and (b) converting the empty flats to office use.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Cabinet Office currently has no plans to rent out or convert the flats in Admiralty House.

**■ Civil Servants: Trade Union Officials**

**John Glen:** [\[10990\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 September to Question 5051 on Civil Servants: Trade Union Officials, whether the Government plans to (a) issue new guidance on and (b) renegotiate existing facility time agreements.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Government is committed to ensuring there is sufficient facility time for all trade union representatives in the public sector. Existing guidance remains in place.

**■ Civil Servants: Workplace Pensions**

**John Glen:** [\[10702\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether direct ministerial appointments are eligible for the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

**Georgia Gould:**

Direct ministerial appointments are not employees of their sponsor department, and therefore not members of the civil service.

It is only civil servants and persons serving in an office or employment listed in Schedule 1 to the Superannuation Act 1972 who are eligible for pension and other benefits which derive from schemes made under section 1 of the Act.

The Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme is a scheme made under section 1 of the Act.

**John Glen:** [\[10706\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, which categories of (a) individual and (b) organisation are eligible to join the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

**Georgia Gould:**

The answers to the questions raised are available in the public domain and can be found on the member and employer sections of the Civil Service Pension website and also the UK Government Legislation website.

**■ Government Departments: Disclosure of Information**

**John Glen:** [\[10967\]](#)

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 and with reference to the when he plans to start to publish (a) transparency data for (i) Ministers, (ii) special advisers and (iii) senior officials and (b) the list of Ministerial interests on a monthly schedule.

**Georgia Gould:**

Transparency reporting requirements remain in place, with data regularly being published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

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.

The List of Ministers' Interests is published twice yearly.

#### ■ **Government Departments: Procurement**

**Alex Sobel:**

[11029]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when his Department plans to publish the debarment list.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Procurement Act 2023 (the Act), which received Royal Assent in October 2023, creates a new debarment regime, including a public debarment list.

As of the 24th February 2025 the Act comes into force, at which point debarment investigations can be started and the debarment list can be created.

#### ■ **Government Departments: Remote Working**

**John Glen:**

[10700]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the answer of 16 September 2024 to Question HL667 on Government Departments: Remote Working, when he plans to provide an update on future publication plans.

**Georgia Gould:**

Civil Service Headquarters (HQ) Occupancy Data publication resumed on 24 October 2024, for the period July - September 2024, with further publications to now happen on a quarterly basis. Data can be found on [GOV.UK](https://gov.uk).

#### ■ **Government Property Agency: Public and Commercial Services Union**

**John McDonnell:**

[10666]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when the Chief Executive of the Government Property Agency will respond to the correspondence of (a) 31 July, (b) 16 August and (c) 26 September 2024 from the PCS union.

**Georgia Gould:**

The Chief Executive of the Government Property Agency will endeavour to prioritise a response to the specific issues highlighted in the next few days, no later than 1 November.

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

**Lloyd Hatton:**

[9330]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to publish a new terms of reference for the Independent Adviser on Ministerial Interests; and whether this will include the power to initiate investigations.

**Georgia Gould:**

I refer to the answer to UIN 5293.

**■ Ministers: Members' Interests****John Glen:**[\[10704\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference Answer of 26 September 2024 to Question HL978 on Ministers: Members' Interests, whether declarations made by Ministers to the House of Commons or House of Lords register of Members' interests constitute a Ministerial declaration under the Ministerial Code.

**Georgia Gould:**

The ministers' interests process, which is set out in the Ministerial Code, is distinct from the parliamentary regimes that exist for Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords to register interests as parliamentarians. All ministers must comply with both the Ministerial Code and the Codes of Conduct of their respective House.

**■ Prime Minister: Ministers' Private Offices****Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[9605\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in 10 Downing Street since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items this was spent.

**Georgia Gould:**

For management and staffing purposes the Prime Minister's Office is a business unit of the Cabinet Office. No expenditure has been made since the dissolution of Parliament.

**■ Public Sector: Pay****John Glen:**[\[10987\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 16 September 2024 to Question 4703 on Public Sector: Pay, if he will take steps to collate this information.

**Georgia Gould:**

This information was not collected centrally by previous administrations, including the administration in which the Right Honourable member served as a minister in this department, and there are no plans to do so in the future.

**■ Special Advisers: Workplace Pensions****John Glen:**[\[10701\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance has been provided by (a) the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff or (b) Cabinet Office special adviser HR to special advisers on the Alpha Civil Service Pension scheme.

**Georgia Gould:**

As with other Civil Servants, special advisers are provided with guidance regarding Civil Service Pension schemes and are directed to published Civil Service Pension scheme resources.

**John Glen:**[\[10709\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 17 September 2024 to Question 4682 on Prime Minister's Chief of Staff: Workplace Pensions, whether other public bodies hold information on the Cash Equivalent Transfer Value of civil service pensions of special advisers.

**Georgia Gould:**

I refer the RH member to PQ9163.

**Trade Union Officials: Facilities Agreements****John Glen:**[\[8126\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what is the timetable for publication under the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017 of trade union facility time data for 2023-24.

**Georgia Gould:**

Self-reported public-sector trade union facility time data, collected under the Facility Time Regulations, will be published before the end of the year. This is in line with our standard timelines for this data set and the timelines under the previous administration.

**Youth Mobility Scheme: EU Countries****Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[10875\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will hold discussions with his EU counterparts on creating a youth mobility scheme.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:**

The Prime Minister and the president of the European Commission met in Brussels on 2 October and agreed to strengthen the relationship between the EU and the UK, putting it on a more solid, stable footing.

We are committed to finding constructive ways to work together and deliver for the British people.

We are not going to give a running commentary on youth mobility. We will obviously look at EU proposals on a range of issues, but there are no plans for a Youth Mobility Scheme, and we will not return to freedom of movement.

**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT****■ Arts: Lincolnshire****Sir John Hayes:**[\[10677\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to increase funding for arts and culture in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

**Chris Bryant:**

After 14 years of indifference and cultural vandalism, this government is committed to making sure that arts and cultural activities will no longer be the preserve of a privileged few. We are working with Arts Council England and others to understand what the challenges and opportunities are for our sectors. As part of the Government's "Creating Growth" plan, DCMS is also undertaking a review documenting current and past funding for the arts, culture, and heritage sectors.

Arts Council England's open funding programme, National Lottery Project Grants, is accessible to organisations and individuals across the country, including those in the South Holland and the Deepings constituency, and across Lincolnshire. This programme provides over £100 million of support annually, and is open to new and emerging artists.

**■ Culture: Stoke-on-Trent North****David Williams:**[\[10910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to improve the accessibility of cultural activities in (a) Stoke-on-Trent North constituency and (b) Kidsgrove.

**Chris Bryant:**

After 14 years of indifference and cultural vandalism, this government is committed to making sure that arts and cultural activities will no longer be the preserve of a privileged few.

DCMS supports its Arms Length Body, Arts Council England (ACE), to improve accessibility to culture. For example, ACE is working in partnership with other arts councils in the UK and Ireland to develop All In, an access scheme dedicated to removing barriers and improving the experience of D/deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people when attending creative and cultural events. This scheme aims to increase overall attendance by making it easier for people with access requirements to find and book tickets; and develop standards for creativity and culture to promote quality and consistency across the UK and Ireland. There will be a pilot of the scheme this autumn, ahead of a wider roll-out in the second half of 2025.

Claybody Theatre, which receives funding from ACE as a National Portfolio Organisation, makes arts more accessible to the people of Stoke-on-Trent, North and beyond. Claybody brings theatre to non-traditional venues in local communities, as well as delivering audio drama in virtual spaces. ACE also provides funding for 'The



Lost Note' project, an immersive theatre project for family audiences that reworks the idea of the seasonal grotto. Working with local neurodivergent and autistic young people from Water Mill School and Fegg Hayes Futures, both based in Stoke-on-Trent North, the project will see children create stories and songs for a series of performances over nine days in January 2025.

## ■ **Film: Liverpool**

**Paula Barker:**

[\[10792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support the growth of the film industry in Liverpool.

**Paula Barker:**

[\[10793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that growth in the British film industry is shared across the UK.

**Chris Bryant:**

The government is firmly committed to supporting the growth of the film industry across every nation and region. Through our UK-wide funding programmes, investment in infrastructure, tax reliefs and support for independent British content, we want the UK to be the best place in the world to make films.

We fund the British Film Institute (BFI) to support the film sector through nationwide funding and initiatives. The BFI's ten year strategy, Screen Culture 2033, sets out its core principle to reach across the full breadth of our nation. The BFI have sought to devolve funding, share power, and support networks across regions, in particular through their Film Audience Network (BFI FAN) which is a collaboration of 8 film hubs, managed by leading film organisations and venues around the UK. Film Hub North covers Liverpool.

The BFI is also tackling skills shortages in the sector to underpin growth across the UK. Under the BFI's National Lottery Skills Clusters Fund, £8.1 million has been awarded to enable six Skills Clusters across the UK to identify skills gaps, coordinate local skills training, and develop clearer pathways to long-term employment in the sector. This programme includes £2.3m awarded to Screen Alliance North - created by the Liverpool Film Office, North East Screen, Screen Manchester, and Screen Yorkshire - over 2023-2026.

We support the British Film Commission (BFC) work, with £6 million in funding, to support the growth of seven geographic production hubs across the UK, by investing in infrastructure and attracting global film productions that bring inward investment into the local and national economy. This includes support for Liverpool, most recently supporting and advising on the Liverpool Littlewoods film studio development.

We also want to support independent British content, to ensure stories from across the UK are told on screen. We recently brought in the Independent Film Tax Credit to support homegrown talent, and we support indie content to grow internationally

through the £28 million UK Global Screen Fund (UKGSF). Daliland and The Almond and The Seahorse, both of which were shot in Liverpool, received international distribution awards from UKGSF.

In addition, to boost the contribution of film tourism to local economies, DCMS Arm's-Length Body VisitBritain uses high profile filming locations as part of its international tourism marketing activity.

#### ■ Health Lottery: Accountability

**Mrs Lorraine Beavers:** [11142]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has had discussions with the Health Lottery on fulfilling its social responsibility duties.

**Mrs Lorraine Beavers:** [11143]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department holds data on the amount the Health Lottery (a) makes in profit and (b) spends on social endeavours.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Health Lottery has social responsibility duties and requirements to provide information to the Gambling Commission about proceeds and how these are split between prizes, expenses and good causes under its licence from the Gambling Commission. The Department has not held discussions with the Health Lottery on fulfilling its social responsibility duties, and does not hold data on its proceeds and the proportion it allocates to good causes.

More information on the responsibilities of large lotteries can be found on the Gambling Commission's website [here](#).

#### ■ Lotteries: Charities

**Richard Baker:** [10399]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support the charity lottery sector.

**Richard Baker:** [10400]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to increase funds that can be raised by charity lotteries.

**Richard Baker:** [10401]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she plans to take to ensure that charities lotteries and the charities they support are not negatively impacted by a statutory gambling levy.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

Society lotteries are a vital fundraising tool for many charities, community groups, sports clubs and other non-commercial organisations. We want to see society lotteries continue to thrive, alongside the National Lottery.

We are committed to reviewing the best available evidence from a wide range of sources and to working with all stakeholders in order to support the industry and ensure there are robust protections in place to protect those at risk. We have commissioned independent research to look at the overall lotteries sector, to strengthen the evidence base for any further review of the limits.

We continue to keep society lottery sales and prize limits under review with the Gambling Commission. We will set out further information on gambling policy, including the statutory levy, to the House soon.

## ■ Performing Arts: EU Countries

**Manuela Perteghella:**

[\[9837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what support her Department provides to UK artists touring in the EU.

**Chris Bryant:**

This Government is working collaboratively across departments to look at how best to help touring artists, and improve arrangements for musicians, performing artists and their support staff being able to tour across the EU.

The Government provides support for UK artists through initiatives such as the Music Export Growth Scheme, co-funded by the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and the International Showcase Fund, which is funded by the DBT. These schemes are designed to help artists access international markets, expand their reach, and promote the UK's creative talent globally.

We will engage with the new European Commission and EU Member States, seeking improved arrangements across the European continent without a return to free movement. Our priority remains ensuring that UK artists can continue to thrive on the global stage.

## ■ Runnymede Trust: Finance

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[10675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department has provided funding to the Runnymede Trust in the last ten years.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has checked all available records which show no funding has been provided to the Runnymede Trust in the last ten years.

## ■ Sports: Video Games

**Josh Newbury:**

[\[11076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to support the development of the esports industry.

**Chris Bryant:**

The Government recognises the potential of the UK esports industry and its impact on the economy, with major tournaments hosted across the UK this year, including in Manchester, Birmingham and London.

Kickstarting economic growth, and breaking down barriers to opportunity are two of this government's core missions. We are supporting the esports sector to grow, building on the success of our world-class creative industries. This includes support for the sector in looking at how to strengthen pathways into the esports workforce.

The Government has identified the creative industries, which includes video games and esports, as a growth-driving sector within the Industrial Strategy. My department will produce an ambitious and targeted Sector Plan for the creative industries to be published alongside the Spending Review in spring 2025.

**■ The Observer: Sales**

**Andrew Pakes:** [\[10891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had discussions with Cabinet Colleagues on the proposed sale of the Observer.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport has not had any discussions with Cabinet Colleagues on the proposed sale of the Observer. Consideration of media mergers is a quasi-judicial decision for the DCMS Secretary of State to undertake alone, on the basis of the evidence available to her, without reference to presentational or political considerations.

**■ Young People**

**David Williams:** [\[10957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what her planned timetable is for introducing a National Youth Strategy.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

On 17 October, the Secretary of State committed to a new National Youth Strategy, co-produced with young people and the youth sector to support a generation to succeed. Further details will be shared in due course.

**■ Youth Services: Stoke-on-Trent North**

**David Williams:** [\[10909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to provide youth services with adequate funding in (a) Stoke-on-Trent North constituency and (b) Kidsgrove.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

As set out in section 507B of the Education Act 1996, local authorities have a statutory duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision of

educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people in their area. This government is aware that after 14 years of decline, many local authorities are struggling with budgets and this has had a direct impact on young people across the country.

That is why, on 17 October 2024, the Secretary of State committed to a new National Youth Strategy, co-produced with young people and the youth sector to support a generation to succeed. We will provide further updates to the House in due course.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Army Cadet Force: Costs

**Neil O'Brien:**

[11295]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost to the public purse was of the Army Cadet force in each year since 2019; and what estimate he has made of the potential cost to the public purse of the Army Cadet force in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026.

**AI Carns:**

Due to the way financial data for the Army Cadet Force is captured and managed, it is taking time to collate all the relevant information. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as practical and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

### ■ Veterans: LGBT+ People

**David Taylor:**

[11146]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to engage with people affected by the ban on LGBT people serving in the British Armed Forces prior to the start of discussions on a financial settlement.

**AI Carns:**

The Government has engaged with people affected by the Ban throughout the response to the Independent Review; the response can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lgbt-veterans-independent-review-government-response>.

Defence has worked closely with key stakeholders on the design of the scheme, enabling the voices of the veterans to be heard. Indications of interest were invited through the application process for non-financial restorative measures, aiding Defence in understanding more about the affected community and ensuring that the scheme considers the needs of the community. Further information regarding the restorative measures can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lgbt-veterans-apply-for-restorative-measures>.

I recently held a briefing in which I welcomed questions and listened to the concerns of veterans directly from their MPs. This Government is committed to holding a

Parliamentary debate to ensure Parliamentary scrutiny is given to the design of the scheme and that all veterans concerns may be represented.

Further information about available support and next steps can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/lgbt-veterans-support-and-next-steps>

## EDUCATION

### ■ Academies: Finance

**Josh Newbury:** [10845]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the central costs of academy trusts on the budgets of academy schools.

**Josh Newbury:** [10846]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the value for money of the central costs of operating academy trusts.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The primary responsibility for the financial oversight of academy trusts rests with the trustees themselves, who are supported by the financial management and governance requirements set by the department in academy trusts' funding agreements, the academy trust handbook and academies accounts direction. The department expects academy trustees to deliver strong governance and monitor the financial health of their trust or school. It is with strong financial management and governance that schools are able to operate most effectively and deliver high quality teaching and learning that prepares our children for the future.

Academy trusts can take a cut from their funding to pay for central services for their schools. This can be more efficient and cheaper than individual schools running or procuring the functions themselves.

Where academy trusts take a cut to pay for central services, they must be transparent by disclosing the basis and value in their published, audited, annual accounts. They must also include additional disclosures in their accounts about the services they deliver centrally and the charging policy they apply. They must also identify the share against each academy.

The government is clear that strong accountability is non-negotiable. That is why the government has committed to bring multi-academy trusts into the inspection system, to make the system fairer and more transparent, and to enable intervention when schools and trusts are not performing to the required standards.

## ■ Artificial Intelligence: Education

**Laura Kyrke-Smith:**

[\[11217\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has carried out research into the impact of AI in education settings on children's wellbeing.

**Stephen Morgan:**

Artificial intelligence (AI) represents an opportunity to give our schools' leaders and teachers a helping hand with classroom life, but only if the technology is safe and reliable and risks are managed appropriately.

The department has undertaken a range of research and engagement to understand the risks and opportunities posed by AI in education. The call for evidence on generative AI in education sought views and experiences from practitioners across all stages of education, as well as the education technology sector and AI experts. The report highlights the opportunities and risks of AI, including consideration of the impacts on pupils and concerns around the quality and reliability of tools.

In partnership with The Responsible Technology Adoption Unit within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, the department commissioned research to understand parent and pupil attitudes to the use of AI in education. This research can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-on-parent-and-pupil-attitudes-towards-the-use-of-ai-in-education/research-on-public-attitudes-towards-the-use-of-ai-in-education>.

Parents and pupils were found to be supportive of opportunities for teachers to use AI to help reduce workload and allow them to focus on face-to-face interactions with pupils, but had concerns about pupil use of AI, including the impacts on wellbeing through over-reliance on technology and privacy and safeguarding risks.

The department's approach to AI in education is informed by these insights. We have committed to publish expectations for the safety of generative AI products used in education to address concerns around safeguarding and privacy. Our project to develop a store of educational content optimised for use with AI aims to drive up the reliability and quality of tools. We are providing funding for innovation to develop tools which will help to reduce everyday feedback and marking workload for teachers, whilst avoiding AI use for high stakes marking, responding to parent and pupil views.

The department will continue to gather feedback and evidence on AI in education to inform the policy direction and remains committed to working in partnership with the sector to respond to technological developments.

## ■ Arts: Education and English Baccalaureate

**Ben Maguire:**

[\[10943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that schools receive adequate funding to provide equitable access to arts education alongside English Baccalaureate subjects in (a) Cornwall and (b) England.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

This government is clear that arts subjects should be part of every child's education.

The independent Curriculum and Assessment Review will advise on how the department delivers a broader curriculum for every child, including arts subjects and English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects. The department will also support children to study a creative or vocational subject to the age of 16 and ensure accountability measures reflect this.

Schools have autonomy over how they spend their core funding and can decide how to best allocate their resources for the benefit of their students. The department does not provide schools with dedicated or ring-fenced funding for either arts subjects or EBacc subjects. Schools do not report back on the funding they have allocated to different subjects.

Overall core revenue funding for schools totals almost £61.8 billion in the 2024/25 financial year. More specifically, through the Dedicated Schools Grant, Cornwall is receiving £406.3 million for mainstream schools in 2024/25.

**Ashfield School: Construction****Lee Anderson:**[\[11047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate her Department has made of when the re-build of Ashfield School will take place.

**Stephen Morgan:**

Ashfield Comprehensive School is currently in the feasibility stage of the School Rebuilding Programme. The feasibility will determine the scope of the project, programme and the budget. Once the feasibility is concluded the department will procure a contractor to undertake the detailed design of the scheme and secure planning permission.

The department currently anticipates appointing a contractor in spring 2025, with construction beginning from autumn/winter 2025.

**Children: Dyslexia****Sojan Joseph:**[\[11534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support children diagnosed with dyslexia in Ashford constituency.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department is committed to improving support for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including those with dyslexia and other neurodiverse conditions.

Early identification of need and support is critical to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND, including those with dyslexia. There is already a number of measures to help teachers do this, including the phonics screening check and statutory assessments at the end of key stage 2.



Measures have also been introduced to support the effective teaching of reading, including for those at risk of falling behind. This includes the English Hubs programme, the publication of the Reading Framework and an updated list of high quality phonics programmes for schools.

The English Hubs programme is dedicated to improving the teaching of reading, with a focus on supporting children making the slowest progress in reading. As part of the continuous professional development provided by the English Hubs, the Reading Ambition for All programme has been launched to improve outcomes for children who need additional support with reading, including those with SEND.

Ashford's local English Hub is Kingsnorth. Further information is available here: <https://www.kingsnorth.kent.sch.uk/english-hub>.

## ■ Pupils: Carers

**Luke Taylor:**

**[10878]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle school absences among young carers.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department wants to ensure that young carers have the best life chances by supporting them in their education. The department recognises that absence from school is almost always a symptom of wider needs and barriers that a family are facing. It is often also the best early indication of need in a family that may not be in contact with other services.

The department's expectations of local authorities and schools, as set out in the 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance, were made statutory on 19 August 2024. The 'support first' ethos of the attendance guidance is that pupils and families, including young carers, should receive holistic, whole-family support to help them overcome the barriers to attendance they are facing. This includes holding regular meetings with the families of pupils who the school, and/or local authority, consider to be vulnerable to discuss attendance and engagement at school. Schools are expected to recognise that absence is a symptom and that improving pupil's attendance is part of supporting the pupil's overall welfare.

Young carers are also now part of the school census, which will improve their visibility in the school system, allowing schools to better identify and support their young carers. This will provide an annual data collection to establish long term trends. Separately, the department also publishes daily attendance data fortnightly and will continue to monitor the quality of data on young carers that is collected via the school register for consideration to include in the daily data collection in the future.

Schools can also use pupil premium funding to support other pupils with identified needs, including young carers. Pupil premium funding has increased to over £2.9 billion for the 2024/25 financial year.

**■ School Libraries: LGBT+ People****Josh Newbury:****[10848]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies of trends in the number of requests to schools to remove LGBT+ literature from school libraries.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The current national curriculum requires teachers to encourage pupils to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information. It also emphasises the importance of children listening to, discussing and reading for themselves a wide range of stories, poems, plays and non-fiction books. Within the framework of the national curriculum, schools make their own choices about which specific books or other resources they use. No authors, books or genres have been banned. Teachers have flexibility in their choice of books to teach within the context of the curriculum. Any sensitive issues should be covered by the school's own policy and in consultation with parents.

**■ Schools: Admissions****Josh Newbury:****[10842]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 13 September 2024 to Question 4283 on Schools: Admissions, what steps her Department is taking to issue guidance to Local Planning Authorities on appropriate levels of section 106 contributions from developers to meet future demand for school places.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

In August 2023, the department published two non-statutory guidance documents for local authorities planning for education, local planning authorities (LPAs) and other stakeholders involved in the delivery of schools.

The guidance on 'Estimating pupil yield from housing development' sets out the department's recommended approach to calculating pupil yield from housing development to inform local plans and planning decisions and to help local authorities and LPAs justify developer contributions towards education. This guidance can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64d0f71be5491a00134b5940/Estimating\\_Pupil\\_Yield\\_from\\_Housing\\_Development.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64d0f71be5491a00134b5940/Estimating_Pupil_Yield_from_Housing_Development.pdf).

The guidance on 'Securing developer contributions for education' promotes good practice on evidencing the impacts of development, engaging with LPAs and delivering expanded or new facilities with funding from housing development. This document can be accessed here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64d0f70d7a5708001314485f/Securing\\_Developer\\_Contributions\\_for\\_Education.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64d0f70d7a5708001314485f/Securing_Developer_Contributions_for_Education.pdf).

## ■ Special Educational Needs

**David Williams:**

[\[10907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help support local authorities to meet the legal deadline to provide an education, health and care plan.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve and thrive but, at the moment, far from every child is being given that chance. The current special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision system has lost the confidence of families and children with SEND are being failed on every measure. The department is planning to work with the teachers, parents, children, therapists and councils that for so long have been trying so hard but have been set up to fail by a broken system. This work forms part of the government's Opportunity Mission, which will break the unfair link between background and opportunity. This begins with giving every child, including those with SEND, the best start in life.

The department wants to ensure that, where required, education, health and care (EHC) plan assessments are progressed promptly and, if needed, plans are issued as quickly as possible so that children and young people can access the support they need.

The department publishes annual data from the SEN2 survey in relation to the processes associated with an EHC plan, including the timeliness of assessments and where agreed, the issuing of an EHC plan. The department closely monitors the information from the annual SEN2 data release and uses it to inform discussions with local areas.

Local authorities identified as having issues with EHC plan timeliness are subject to additional monitoring by the department who work with the specific local authority. Where we have concerns about the local authority's capacity to make the required improvements, we have secured specialist SEND Advisor support to help identify the barriers to EHC plan process timeliness and put in place practical plans for recovery.

We know that local authorities have been impacted by increased demand for EHC plans and workforce capacity to meet this demand, so more efficient and effective service delivery, alongside communication with schools and families, is central to the recovery.

When inspections indicate that there are significant concerns with local authority performance, the department will intervene directly. This may mean issuing an Improvement Notice, Statutory Direction and/or appointing a commissioner, the deployment of which is considered on a case-by-case basis. We also provide support and challenge, for example from SEND Improvement Advisers and Sector Led Improvement Partners, to address the challenges local authorities face and improve services for children.

**■ Special Educational Needs: Stoke-on-Trent North****David Williams:**[\[10906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support early speech and language interventions in (a) Stoke-on-Trent North constituency and (b) Kidsgrove.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Early language skills are vital to enable children to thrive in early years and later in life, including for all aspects of later attainment in school.

The department has provided funding for settings to undertake evidence-based continuous professional development programmes, including those focused on speech, language and communication, via a national network of Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs. This has involved working closely with the Education Endowment Foundation to build the evidence pipeline in early speech and language interventions.

The department has invested £28.7 million to enable 75 local authorities, including Stoke, to establish home learning environment services through Family Hubs, to tackle the pandemic's impact on children's education and enable investment in speech and language interventions.

The department also works in partnership with NHS England to deliver the Early Language Support for Every Child pathfinders, as well as working with partners to deliver an Early Language Local Innovation and Excellence programme, which includes implementation of published Speech and Language Communication pathway guidance and an Early Language Identification Measure.

Subsequently, the department has invested over £20 million in the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme. In July 2024, we announced that funded support for the 11,100 schools registered for the NELI programme (two thirds of English state primaries) would continue for the 2024/25 academic year. Schools across Stoke-On-Trent North and Kidsgrove are able to access the NELI intervention.

**ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO****■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: USA****Sir Gavin Williamson:**[\[11278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what is the estimated carbon footprint of his recent visit to Washington DC.

**Kerry McCarthy:**

All Ministerial travel is subject to an assessment of the value of the engagement against a number of factors, including the mode of travel.

## ■ Energy Supply: Buildings

**Chi Onwurah:**

[\[11251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, which organisation is responsible for ensuring the connection of large energy user buildings.

**Michael Shanks:**

Depending on the capacity they require, large energy users can connect to either the low-voltage distribution network or the high-voltage transmission network. The networks are owned by private companies that are solely responsible for ensuring the delivery of connections and regulated independently by Ofgem. The distribution network is owned and operated by six Distribution Network Operators across Great Britain. The transmission network is owned by three Transmission Owners and operated by the National Energy System Operator.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

**Richard Foord:**

[\[900990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support businesses in rural areas.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government is committed to improving the quality of life for people living and working in rural areas, so that we can realise the full potential of rural business and communities.

Rural Rate Relief aims to ensure that key amenities are available, and community assets protected in rural areas. It provides 100% rate relief for properties that are based in eligible rural areas with populations below 3,000.

The specific challenges and opportunities that make rural economies distinctive can be harnessed through funds such as the Rural England Prosperity Fund, which will provide up to £110 million in targeted support to rural businesses and communities in England between April 2023 and March 2025.

We know farmers require stability, which is why we are committed to Environmental Land Management schemes and will optimise schemes in an orderly way, ensuring they produce the right outcomes for all farmers, while delivering food security and nature recovery in a just and equitable way. We will also support farmers by offering a new deal, including cutting energy prices by setting up GB Energy, ensuring future trade deals are fairer for British farmers, and procuring more British produce in Government.

Spending on rural businesses and farming in future financial years will be confirmed as part of the Government's spending review.

## ■ Agriculture: Carbon Emissions

**Ian Lavery:** [\[9714\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support farmers to reduce emissions.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

This Government is committed to delivering net zero by 2050 and we will work in collaboration with farmers and others with a stake in our food system towards this.

The transition to more climate friendly practices will work hand in hand with food security and farm productivity. We will support farmers to adopt low carbon farming practices, increasing the carbon stored on their land while boosting profitability.

## ■ Anaerobic Digestion

**Jim Shannon:** [\[9460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has had discussions on using farm effluage and sewage for anaerobic digestion instead of importing wood chippings as biomass.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

There are anaerobic digestion plants across the UK that generate electricity through the combustion of biogas produced through the breakdown of sewage or agricultural waste.

Biomass generators, in contrast, generate electricity through the combustion of solid fuel. As biomass is a different type of technology, it uses different types of feedstock. In general, sewage cannot substitute for solid biomass fuel.

## ■ Birds: Conservation

**Edward Morello:** [\[11145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, of the potential impact of a lack of nest sites, including buildings, on Red Listed cavity-nesting birds.

**Mary Creagh:**

Cavity nesting birds in England that use buildings, and which are on the Red List (Birds of Conservation Concern), are the house sparrow, house martin, swift and starling. While Defra has not made an assessment of the potential impact of a lack of nest sites, Natural England, working with its partners, has identified that the lack of nest sites is one of the pressures on these species. Therefore, provision of nest boxes may aid recovery alongside other actions, such as to increase food resources.

## ■ Cats: Veterinary Services

**Mark Swards:** [\[11118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to help increase the affordability of cat neutering services.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Competition and Markets Authority, which is independent from Defra, is currently undertaking a market investigation into veterinary services, which includes the cost of veterinary care. Defra will review any recommendations that are made by the CMA when their process concludes in 2025. Some animal charities support the cost of neutering in certain circumstances.

## ■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Buildings

**Sir Ashley Fox:** [\[9617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many and what proportion of desks were occupied in each of his Department's offices in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available; and how many staff attended each office in person in the same period.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Heads of Department have agreed that 60% minimum office attendance for most staff continues to be the best balance of working for the Civil Service. Office occupancy data for the period July - September has been published, with further publications to now happen on a quarterly basis. The data is published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-hq-occupancy-data>

## ■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Labour Turnover

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[11109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the staff turnover rate in his Department was in each of the last five years.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Figures are taken from the Annual Civil Service Employment Survey for the core department. The data reference point in time is 31 March at each year.

REFERENCE PERIOD	CIVIL SERVICE TURNOVER*	DEPARTMENTAL TURNOVER**
12 months up to 31 March 2024	7.4%	14.3%
12 months up to 31 March 2023	8.6%	15.7%
12 months up to 31 March 2022	7.3%	13.7%

REFERENCE PERIOD	CIVIL SERVICE TURNOVER*	DEPARTMENTAL TURNOVER**
12 months up to 31 March 2021	5.1%	13.1%
12 months up to 31 March 2020	8.1%	14.6%

\* includes all moves out of the Civil Service over the specified year.

\*\*includes moves between Civil Service departments within the year, in addition to moves included under the Civil Service turnover rate.

### ■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Staff

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[11205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many and what proportion of staff employed by his Department work exclusively on farming issues.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The information requested is not held centrally and to obtain it would incur disproportionate costs.

### ■ Dogs: Animal Welfare

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[10834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if his Department will publish a consultation on the regulation of dog behaviour and training services.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra are working with police, local authorities and animal welfare groups to promote responsible dog ownership. As part of this work, we will continue to consider the role of education and training (for both dogs and their owners) in encouraging responsible dog ownership.

### ■ Droughts

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[9982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of the impact of drought conditions on (a) the economy and (b) food supplies in each year since 2010.

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[9983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of the potential impact of rain conditions on (a) food supplies and (b) the economy in each year since 2010.



**Daniel Zeichner:**

The UK agricultural sector is highly resilient and adaptable and operates in an open market with the value of commodities established by those in the supply chain. We have seen evidence of this particularly in recent years following global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

There are a wide range of factors that affect harvest size and livestock production, including input costs, currency fluctuations and market demand.

**Food: Imports****Sam Carling:**[\[10883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of importing food produced to lower animal welfare standards than those required domestically on the UK farming sector.

**Sam Carling:**[\[10884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure egg-based products imported into the UK are from hens kept to welfare standards equivalent to those required in the UK.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

The Government shares the public's high regard for the UK's environmental protections, food standards and animal welfare.

The Government recognises farmers' concerns about imports produced using methods not permitted in the UK. We have been clear that we will use our Trade Strategy to promote the highest food production standards.

**Hunting****Vikki Slade:**[\[10569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his planned timetable is for bringing forward legislative proposals to end fox hunting.

**Mary Creagh:**

This is a devolved matter with regard to Scotland and Northern Ireland; hunting with dogs is a reserved matter with respect to Wales and therefore, the information provided relates to England and Wales only.

The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act. This includes Fox Hunting.

In addition, the Government made a manifesto commitment to ban Trail Hunting as part of a set of measures to improve animal welfare. Work to determine the best approach for doing so is ongoing. Further announcements will be made in due course.

## ■ Hunting: Foxes

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[11101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to tackle illegal fox hunting.

**Mary Creagh:**

This is a devolved matter with regard to Scotland and Northern Ireland; hunting with dogs is a reserved matter with respect to Wales and therefore, the information provided relates to England and Wales only.

The Hunting Act 2004 makes it an offence to hunt a wild mammal with dogs except where it is carried out in accordance with the exemptions in the Act. Those found guilty under the Act are subject to the full force of the law. Enforcement of the Hunting Act is an operational matter for the police.

In addition, the Government made a manifesto commitment to ban Trail Hunting as part of a set of measures to improve animal welfare. Work to determine the best approach for doing so is ongoing. Further announcements will be made in due course.

## ■ Import Controls

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke:** [\[10982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the consistency of phytosanitary certificate checks at the UK Border.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Checks are handled by trained staff working to standard operating procedures, ensuring inspections are undertaken safely and efficiently.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency's plant health import inspection process is accredited to the ISO 17020 Inspection Standard which is subject to external audits from the UK Accreditation Service.

Inspectors are rigorously trained and are equipped to ensure sanitary and phytosanitary goods are handled safely and with care.

## ■ Landfill: Regulation

**Josh Newbury:** [\[11079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made a recent assessment of the adequacy of the (a) powers and (b) resources of the Environment Agency to regulate landfill sites.

**Mary Creagh:**

The regulatory framework in place is designed to serve operators and protect the local community. Where poor performance does occur the Environment Agency has a range of powers to bring sites back into compliance and, where necessary, to take

enforcement action against operators. Regulatory oversight of permitted sites is funded by permitting fees, which are calculated on a full cost recovery basis, in line with the Polluter Pays principle and HM Treasury's managing public money guidance.

## ■ Meat: Smuggling

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[\[10799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much illegal meat coming into the UK was seized in (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Illegal meat seizures data captured as part of Defra's African Swine Fever programme:

- 2023, 552 seizures, totalling 44,482 kg
- 2024 (Jan- 11 Oct 2024), 576 seizures, totalling 42,470 kg

## ■ Packaging: Recycling

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke:**

[\[10979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what level extended producer responsibility fees will be set at.

**Mary Creagh:**

In August 2024, we released the first set of illustrative packaging extended producer responsibility base fees covering the following eight packaging materials: aluminium, fibre-based composite materials, glass, paper or board, plastic, steel, wood and other materials.

In September 2024, we released a second set of illustrative base fees using an updated methodology, based principally on 'Report Packaging Data' (RPD) producer reported tonnages from 2023 alongside Defra-modelled Local Authority costs. This is the same underlying approach and datasets that the Scheme Administrator intends to use for final fees from 2025, with all tonnages based on RPD data.

Final fees can only be calculated after 1 April 2025, the deadline for large organisations to report their packaging data for the period July to December 2024.

These fees have been published and can be found here: [Extended producer responsibility for packaging: illustrative base fees - GOV.UK](#).

## ■ Pets: Animal Breeding

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[10833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating a centralised database of licenced (a) breeders and (b) sellers of (i) dogs and (ii) other pets.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Interested parties can check whether a dog breeder or pet seller is licensed without separately referring to a database. Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018, licensed dog breeders and pet sellers must display a copy of their licence at any premises where the activity is carried out and their licence number and name on any website used for the activity.

The associated statutory guidance also recommends that local authorities publish a list of licenced businesses and their star ratings on their website.

■ **Pets: Animal Welfare****Mark Swards:**[\[10934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle the abandonment of domestic animals.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

Defra regularly meets animal welfare stakeholders to understand issues and trends that are affecting the sector, including the impact of the rise in the cost of living on pet keepers and welfare organisations. Defra welcomes the support that the animal sector has provided through pet food banks and financial support with veterinary treatment.

The animal sector offers helpful advice to potential pet owners on the responsibilities that come with pet ownership including free guides on the estimated lifetime costs of owning a pet.

■ **Poultry: Animal Housing****Clive Jones:**[\[11121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to launch a consultation on phasing out cages for layer hens.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

We are firmly committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare and want to work closely with the farming sector to deliver high standards.

The use of enriched 'colony' cages for laying hens is an issue we will want to fully consider in due course.

**FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ **Afghanistan: Religious Freedom****Sir Julian Lewis:**[\[11219\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help end violations of freedom of religion or belief in Afghanistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Government continues to call for the human rights of all Afghans to be protected, including the freedom of religion or belief, and we regularly press the Taliban on this through our Doha based UK Mission to Afghanistan. Ministers and officials also engage regularly with a range of Afghans, including religious and ethnic minorities, to ensure our policy and programming reflect the needs of the entire population. In October, we co-sponsored a Human Rights Council resolution extending the mandate of UN Special Rapporteur, Richard Bennett, to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan for another year, including that of minority groups.

**Balochistan: Human Rights****Sojan Joseph:**[\[11144\]](#)

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 human rights situation in Balochistan.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK is deeply concerned about reports of human rights abuses and violations in Pakistan, including in Balochistan province. The British High Commission regularly raises these issues with the Government of Pakistan at a senior level. The UK will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all people as laid down in Pakistan's Constitution and in accordance with international standards.

**British Nationals Abroad: Departmental Responsibilities****Alicia Kearns:**[\[11174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 2 September 2024 to Question 2311 on British Nationals Abroad: Departmental Responsibilities, whether the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan) is responsible for cross-departmental representation of British expats within the Government on matters other than consular and crisis operations.

**Alicia Kearns:**[\[11176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 2 September 2024 to Question 2311 on British Nationals Abroad: Departmental Responsibilities, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating a ministerial portfolio for representing the interests of UK citizens living abroad.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

I am the Minister responsible for consular and crisis operations. My Ministerial responsibilities do not include cross-departmental representation of British expats beyond consular and crisis operations.

The Government has no plans to make an assessment of the potential merits of creating a ministerial portfolio for representing the interests of UK citizens living

abroad. Detailed information for British Nationals living abroad can be found on GOV.UK. Our Consular operation offers British Nationals a 24/7, 365 days a year service.

## ■ Egypt: Copts

**Sir Edward Leigh:** [\[10039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of recent reports of violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK will champion freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all, including through the UN, G7, in multilateral fora and in bilateral relationships. No one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. The Egyptian Government has stated a firm commitment to protect the rights of Coptic Christians and their freedom of worship. Protections for freedom of religion are enshrined in the constitution. President Sisi has publicly committed in recent years to uphold minority rights and FoRB. I will continue to make clear to the Egyptian authorities the importance we attach to these issues.

## ■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Samoa

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** [\[11279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what is the estimated carbon footprint of his recent visit to Samoa.

**Catherine West:**

An essential aspect of the Foreign Secretary's role is to represent the UK's interests on the global stage and ministerial travel is undertaken using efficient and cost-effective arrangements. The information required to calculate the carbon footprint of official overseas ministerial travel will be published as part of the Cabinet Office transparency returns and made available on the GOV.UK website. It has been the practice that official FCDO flights to attend major events are carbon offset where that is possible. The Foreign Secretary travelled via a commercial flight to Samoa for CHOGM, following travel to South Korea, China and Indonesia.

## ■ Gaza: Doctors

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[10868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure specialist doctors can enter Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

UK funding is supporting humanitarian partners to reach those in desperate need of medical assistance: through our support to UK-Med we are helping to run field hospitals in Gaza; on 16 October I announced £1 million of UK assistance to support medically evacuated Palestinians in Egypt; and on 17 October we agreed to match

up to £10 million of public donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee's Middle East humanitarian appeal.

The UK Government is closely monitoring the impact of the conflict in Gaza on access to medical facilities and healthcare. As the Foreign Secretary said on 16 October, Israel can and must do more to ensure that humanitarian assistance can move freely and safely within Gaza - this includes medical workers.

## ■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Steve Witherden:**

[\[11140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much and what UK-funded aid has been denied entry into Gaza since 7 October 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

During my visit to Al Arish, Egypt on 16 October, where I announced £1 million of UK assistance for Egypt's support to medically evacuated Gazans, I saw that many tonnes of lifesaving aid continue to be denied entry into Gaza by Israel. As the Foreign Secretary said on 16 October, Israel must do more to get aid into Gaza. We continue to press Israel to allow aid to flow freely into and through Gaza; the Prime Minister stressed this during his 19 October discussion with Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The UK continues to play a leading role in alleviating the suffering in Gaza. We provide significant funding to partners to support those most in need, including agreeing to match up to £10 million of public donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee's Middle East humanitarian appeal.

## ■ **Gaza: Israel**

**Nadia Whittome:**

[\[10808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of reports that Israeli settlers plan to cross into Gaza and create outposts.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Settlements are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. The Government will challenge those who undermine the prospects of a two-state solution or use hateful rhetoric. We will look at all options to take tougher action.

Settlement expansion in the West Bank has reached record levels in the past year and has been accompanied by an increase in settler violence. During the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel and the OPTs on 14-15 July, he met with Palestinians displaced in the West Bank and was horrified to hear of acts of violence carried out by settlers. The Foreign Secretary made the UK's position clear to those communities and to the Israeli government.

**Nadia Whittome:**

[\[10809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of reports of Israeli forces (a) starving and (b) killing Palestinian civilians in Northern Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

As the Foreign Secretary set out in his statement of 16 October, the humanitarian situation in Northern Gaza is dire. Israel must ensure civilians are protected and ensure routes are open to allow life-saving aid through. The UK is clear that International Humanitarian Law must be upheld, and civilians protected. We continue to raise issues of International Humanitarian Law with the Israel at the highest levels.

**Abtisam Mohamed:**

[\[10867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the conference entitled Preparing to resettle Gaza, which took place in Israel on Monday 21 October 2024.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The Foreign Secretary has not yet discussed this conference with his Israeli counterpart. The UK's position on all settlements is clear; they are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. The Government will challenge those who undermine the prospects of a two-state solution or use hateful rhetoric.

We support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people. We must give the people of the West Bank and Gaza the political horizon of a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future, and it needs to be irreversible.

**Abtisam Mohamed:**

[\[10882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on reports of land grabs by settlers in northern Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

This government is committed to upholding international law. The UK's position on all settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. The Government will challenge those who undermine the prospects of a two-state solution or use hateful rhetoric. The UK also condemns inciteful remarks, such as those made by Israel's National Security Minister Ben-Gvir, which seek to inflame tensions and harm the viability of a two-state solution.

Settlement expansion in the West Bank has reached record levels in the past year and has been accompanied by an increase in settler violence. During the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel and the OPTs on 14-15 July, he met with Palestinians displaced in the West Bank and was horrified to hear of acts of violence carried out by settlers. The Foreign Secretary made the UK's position clear to those communities



and to the Israeli government. Settlements are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace, and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. We will look at all options to take tougher action.

## ■ Georgia: LGBT+ People

**Nadia Whittome:**

[\[11460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the election results in Georgia on the safety of LGBTQ+ people in that country.

**Stephen Doughty:**

We have not yet assessed the specific impact of the 27 October Georgian parliamentary elections on the safety of LGBT+ people. However, it is clear that the direction of the Georgian Dream party risks undermining freedom of expression and assembly and further discriminating against and stigmatising Georgia's LGBT+ community, including through the introduction of the Law on Family Values. We work closely with our partners to advance equality, including through the Equal Rights Coalition and the European LGBTI Focal Points Network. On 9 October, I raised my concerns over recent legislative changes, including these laws, with Georgian Foreign Minister Darchiashvili.

## ■ Hamas: Hostage Taking

**Blair McDougall:**

[\[10234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with international counterparts on Israeli hostages still held in Gaza.

**Blair McDougall:**

[\[10235\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Qatari counterpart to help secure the release of the 101 Israeli hostages being held in Gaza.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

Since day one, we have been working alongside our allies and partners in the region, including Qatar, in support of ongoing negotiations. The UK welcomes the tireless efforts of our partners in Qatar, Egypt and the United States. We need the hostages returned immediately and unconditionally. We must see greater protection of civilians, a rapid increase in humanitarian aid to Gaza, and to enable the UN and humanitarian agencies to be able to operate safely in Gaza. During his most recent visit to the region on 9 October, the Foreign Secretary reiterated the need for an immediate ceasefire to ensure their safe release.

**■ Israel: Hezbollah****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[10499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of alleged reports that Hezbollah plans to advance into Galilee in Israel on the UK's strategic interests.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK Government has not yet made an assessment on this specific issue. However, we have been clear that resolving the on-going conflict is key to regional security. The United Kingdom condemns Hizballah's attacks on Israel over the last 11 months, which have driven more than 60,000 people from their homes. These unjustified attacks have brought misery to ordinary people in Lebanon and Israel. They have done nothing to end the conflict in Gaza or secure Palestinian statehood. Hizballah has been proscribed in its entirety as a terrorist organisation since 2019. The UK has long had a no-contact policy with Hizballah. The UK does not provide any assistance or funding to Hizballah, Hizballah-led ministries or Hizballah-led institutions.

**■ Kurds: Elections****John Slinger:**[\[11191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the outcome of the recent parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan region in Iraq.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK was pleased to welcome the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's parliamentary election which took place on 20 October 2024. This election was an essential opportunity for the people of the Region to have their voices heard, as demonstrated by the high turnout (72%). After two-years of delays, this election contributes to the renewal of the Kurdistan Regional Government's democratic legitimacy.

We look forward to the resumption of the regional parliament and the formation of a regional government as soon as possible.

The UK continues to support a thriving Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Through our diplomatic engagements with the KRI's political parties, we still urge greater cooperation between them to confront shared economic, political and security challenges.

**■ Lebanon: Hezbollah****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[10500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking with international partners to help protect United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) personnel from attacks by Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK Government condemns all threats to United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon's (UNIFIL) security and calls on all parties to ensure the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel at all times and to allow UNIFIL to continue carrying out its mandate. In a call on 16 October with the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the Foreign Secretary discussed the need for all parties to ensure freedom of movement for UNIFIL personnel. We are also calling on Hizballah to de-escalate immediately and urging Iran to stand down their proxy. Only a political solution, consistent with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, can bring stability and security to South Lebanon. The UK continues to work in lockstep with our allies, including Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt to de-escalate the situation and we urge all parties to end this cycle of violence.

**■ Palestinians: Disability****Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[10859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help support disabled Palestinians to access (a) medicines and (b) other healthcare.

**Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[10860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if his Department will take steps to ensure that humanitarian aid sent to Gaza includes medical equipment for disabled people.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK government is closely monitoring the impact of the conflict in Gaza on access to medical facilities and healthcare, including for disabled people. Through our support to UK-Med, we are helping to run field hospitals in Gaza. On 16 October, I announced £1 million of UK assistance to support medically evacuated Palestinians in Egypt. Through the World Health Organisation, the funds will provide vital supplies and medications, including rehabilitative equipment, and will strengthen capacity to care for patients with chronic diseases. UK funding to UNICEF is also providing lifesaving healthcare and specialist treatment to families in Gaza. We continue to press Israeli leaders on aid access including medical supplies: On 18 October the Prime Minister underlined that the dire humanitarian situation cannot continue. Israel can and must do more to ensure aid reaches civilians in Gaza.

**■ Palestinians: Gender Based Violence****Steve Witherden:**[\[11139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of allegations of sexual violence and assault perpetrated against (a) women in Palestine and (b) Palestinian women detained in Israeli prisons.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

The UK unequivocally condemns all alleged violations and abuses, including sexual violence, and calls for all reports to be fully investigated to ensure justice for victims and survivors. We are deeply concerned by allegations of sexual violence against Palestinian detainees by Israeli forces. We believe it is critical that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is given regular access to detainees to carry out its independent visiting role, as enshrined within the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Currently, the ICRC cannot fully investigate these reports, as Israel continues to deny it access to places of detention. The UK calls on all parties to the conflict to comply with international law and grant immediate and unfettered access for the ICRC.

**■ Palestinians: Women's Rights**

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[10865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to help protect the rights of Palestinian women and girls.

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[10866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with his Israeli counterpart on protecting the rights of Palestinian women and girls.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We are deeply alarmed by the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women and girls. The Foreign Secretary has raised and continues to raise our concerns around International Humanitarian Law compliance with the Israeli government. The UK is funding several trusted partners to support civilians in Gaza, including women and children. Assistance includes support to pregnant women, distribution of dignity kits for women and girls, mental health and psychosocial support, and water, sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and health services.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE****■ Audiology: Paediatrics**

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[10931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many paediatric audiology departments there are in England; and how many of those meet the UK Accreditation Services Improving Quality in Physiological Services Accreditation standards.

**Karin Smyth:**

There are 140 providers of audiology services for children in England. Currently, 30 providers meet the UK Accreditation Services Improving Quality in Physiological Services Accreditation standards. Two providers are pending re-instatement of accreditation, and a further 16 have applied for accreditation.

## ■ Brain Cancer: Medical Treatments

**Satvir Kaur:**

[\[8063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help improve outcomes for glioblastoma brain tumour patients.

**Karin Smyth:**

NHS England and the Department are taking several steps to help improve outcomes for glioblastoma brain tumour patients. NHS England has worked with the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission to designate centres of excellence in the management of brain tumours, with nine centres having achieved designation. The Mission has a workstream on training to expand the brain tumour treatment workforce in collaboration between National Health Service bodies, Royal Colleges and charities.

Further to this, in September 2024, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) announced new research funding opportunities for brain cancer research, including glioblastoma, spanning both adult and paediatric populations. This includes a national NIHR Brain Tumour Research Consortium, to ensure the most promising research opportunities are made available to adult and child patients and a new funding call to generate high quality evidence in brain tumour care, support and rehabilitation.

We are aware of Siobhain McDonagh's campaign, in memory of the late Baroness McDonagh, and are committed to working together to explore options.

We will get the NHS diagnosing cancer, including brain tumours, on time, diagnosing it earlier and treating it faster so more patients survive this horrible set of diseases, and we will improve patients' experience across the system. To do this, we will address the challenges in diagnostic waiting times, providing the number of CT, MRI and other tests that are needed to reduce cancer waits.

## ■ Brain: Tumours

**Victoria Collins:**

[\[11185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he is taking steps to include brain tumours in personalised mRNA-based cancer immunotherapies research.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Between 2018 and 2023, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) has directly invested £11.3 million in research projects and programmes focused on brain tumours. This has enabled 227 brain cancer research studies to take place. Brain cancer remains one of the hardest to treat cancers, which is why in September, the NIHR announced new research funding opportunities for brain cancer research.

The Government is supporting the development of personalised mRNA-based cancer immunotherapies through our partnership with BioNTech, which aims to provide up to 10,000 United Kingdom based patients with mRNA-based immunotherapies by 2030. The NHS England Cancer Vaccine Launchpad has been established to accelerate

the development of cancer vaccines. We are not able to comment at this stage on the pipeline of clinical trials that BioNTech will launch in the UK over the coming years.

### ■ Civil Society: Suicide

**Stuart Anderson:** [\[10773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to provide further funding to (a) voluntary community and (b) social enterprise organisations responding to local suicide rates.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government has committed to tackling suicide. We will recruit an additional 8,500 new mental health workers, and these new staff will be specially trained to support people at risk of suicide.

The Department continues to provide funding to a wide range of national and local voluntary and community organisations to support their work on suicide prevention through the £10 million Suicide Prevention Grant Fund, which runs to March 2025.

### ■ Community Diagnostic Centres

**Victoria Atkins:** [\[11317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) checks, (b) tests and (c) scans were carried out at community diagnostic centres opened since the 2021 Spending Review, as of 4 July 2024.

**Victoria Atkins:** [\[11318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) checks, (b) tests and (c) scans were carried out at community diagnostic centres opened since the 2021 Spending Review in (i) January 2024, (ii) February 2024, (iii) March 2024, (iv) April 2024, (v) May 2024, (vi) June 2024 and (vii) July 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

As of the end of June 2024, community diagnostics centres (CDCs) had delivered 9,292,578 tests, checks and scans since the 2021 Spending Review at the end of October. Over this period, the diagnostic waiting list has increased from 1,428,415 as at the end of October 2021 where 356,784 (25.0%) people were waiting over six weeks, to 1,639,813 at the end of June 2024 where 375,416 (23.9%) people were waiting over 6-weeks for a diagnostic test. 2024/25 NHS Operational Planning Guidance set an objective for just 5% to be waiting six weeks. Due to seasonal effects, some care should be exercised when comparing six week wait percentages figures in different months of the year.

CDC activity data is published monthly and cannot be provided up to a specific date within that month. Published CDC activity data details activity from July 2021 to August 2024. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/cdc-management-information/>

Monthly activity and waiting list data for diagnostics is published monthly and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/monthly-diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/>

The following table lists the number of checks, tests and scans delivered in each of the requested months across 2024:

MONTH	CDC ACTIVITY DELIVERED SINCE OCT-21 SPENDING REVIEW	CDC ACTIVITY DELIVERED IN EACH MONTH
Jan-24	6,841,026	393,742
Feb-24	7,279,148	438,122
Mar-24	7,826,454	547,306
Apr-24	8,263,510	437,056
May-24	8,718,759	455,249
Jun-24	9,292,578	573,819
Jul-24	9,771,674	479,096

Source: NHS England

**Victoria Atkins:**

**[11319]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) first stage and (b) second stage cancer patients received a diagnosis following an appointment at a community diagnostic centre opened since the 2021 Spending Review.

**Karin Smyth:**

Data on the routes to diagnosis for cancer, which is collated and published by the National Disease Registration Service (NDRS) does not specify the setting where the diagnostic test took place, so we do not hold the information on diagnoses following appointments in CDCs.

As of the end of August 2024, the diagnostic waiting list was 1,559,284, where 373,126 (23.9%) patients were waiting over six weeks. This compares to 1,428,415 as at the end of October 2021, following the 2021 Spending Review, where 356,784 (25%) patients were waiting over 6-weeks for a diagnostic test. 2024/25 NHS Operational Planning Guidance set an objective for just 5% to be waiting six weeks. Due to seasonal effects, some care should be exercised when comparing six week wait percentages figures in different months of the year.

In August 2024, performance against the Faster Diagnosis Standard was 75.5%, 0.5 percentage points above the operational standard. Due to the impact of working days

per month and seasonality, impacting the amount of activity per month, we cannot directly compare performance to October 2021.

Monthly activity and waiting list data for diagnostics is published monthly and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/monthly-diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/>

## ■ **Coronavirus: Health Education**

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[11724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of running a public awareness campaign to remove all COVID signs.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

No assessment of the merits of running a public awareness campaign to remove all COVID-19 signs has been made.

## ■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

**Esther McVey:**

[\[11248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6194 on Coronavirus: Vaccination, whether the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has made an assessment of the potential implications for future medical decisions of the Pfizer study abstract entitled, Post Conditional Approval Active Surveillance Study Among Individuals in Europe Receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Vaccine, dated 12 March 2024; and when he plans to publish the full study.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The study abstract has been reviewed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), as part of its continuous post approval safety monitoring procedures for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine (Comirnaty). The abstract is available at the following link:

<https://catalogues.ema.europa.eu/system/files/2024-06/C4591021%20Interim%20Study%20Report%20Abstract%200.pdf>

The MHRA does not consider that any regulatory action is warranted at this time and will review the final study report, when it's made available by Pfizer, as part of safety monitoring procedures.

The MHRA does not publish study reports for company studies, and further publications of results are the responsibility of Pfizer-BioNTech. The MHRA continues to closely monitor the safety of all COVID-19 vaccines and will take any regulatory action necessary should any new safety concerns be identified.



## ■ Dental Services: Scarborough And Whitby

**Alison Hume:**

[\[7176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of dental care provision in Scarborough and Whitby constituency; and whether he plans to take steps to help improve that provision.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 9 October 2024]:* Dental Statistics - England 2023-24, published by the NHS Business Services Authority on 22 August 2024, is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324>

The data for NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, which includes the Scarborough and Whitby constituency, shows that 42% of adults were seen by a National Health Service dentist in the previous 24 months, compared to 40% in England; and 60% of children were seen by an NHS dentist in the previous 12 months, compared to 56% in England.

This Government is committed to tackling the challenges for patients trying to access NHS dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care dentistry to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. ICBs are responsible for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local populations and to determine the priorities for investment.

## ■ Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People Independent Review

**Nick Timothy:**

[\[10237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the oral contribution of the Leader of the House of 17 October 2024, Official Report, column 1000, what his planned timetable is for providing an update on the implementation of the Cass review in the NHS.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 24 October 2024]:* On 4 September 2024, my Rt. Hon Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care laid a written ministerial statement in the House of Commons outlining the Government and NHS England's work to implement the Cass Review and transform gender services.

In line with NHS England's ambitious two-year implementation plan, two new services in the North-West and London opened in April. A third new service will open in the South West in November, and a fourth in the East of England in spring of next year.

NHS England is advancing towards meeting its commitment for there to be a specialist children's gender service in every region by 2026. My Rt. Hon Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will update the House when there are further developments.

### ■ General Practitioners: Finance

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[11046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much (a) funding and (b) other resources his Department is providing to GP practices to help meet the demand for appointments in the (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26 financial year.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We hugely value the critical role that general practitioners (GPs) play, and we are determined to address the issues they face by shifting the focus of the National Health Service beyond hospitals and into the community. GPs and primary care have been receiving a smaller proportion of NHS resources over time, and we're committed to reversing that.

On 28 February 2024, NHS England published details of the changes to the GP contract for 2024/25, including an overall increase in funding of £259 million, taking overall contract investment to £11,864 million in 2024/25. The 2024/25 contract at that point included a 2% planning assumption for pay, which was used to uplift the GP contract from 1 April 2024. We turned to the independent pay review body, the Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration Board (DDRB), for a recommendation on pay for 2024/25.

We have accepted the DDRB's recommendations in full and, following consultation with the British Medical Association, we uplifted the pay element of the GP contract by 6% on a consolidated basis, an increase of 4% on top of the 2% interim uplift in April, to provide practices with funding to uplift GP partners, salaried GPs, and other salaried staff pay by 6%. The global sum element of the contract has been increased by 7.4% to fund the 6% increase in pay.

Departmental expenditure limits for 2025/26 will be set alongside the Budget in October. The overall GP contract investment in 2025/26 will be determined afterwards.

### ■ General Practitioners: Gosport

**Dame Caroline Dinenge:**

[\[10432\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 7738 on General Practitioners: Gosport, what steps he plans to take to introduce Neighbourhood Health Centres in Gosport constituency.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We have committed to trialling Neighbourhood Health Centres to bring together a range of services, ensuring healthcare is closer to home and patients receive the care they deserve. This is part of our broader ambition to move towards a

Neighbourhood Health Service, with more care delivered in local communities to spot problems earlier.

I thank my Rt. Hon. friend for their suggestion of Gosport as a trial location. We are working with officials to explore options for how best to trial Neighbourhood Health Centres.

## ■ GP Surgeries

**Neil O'Brien:**

[6457]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many GP premises there were in 2010.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

In 2010, there were 8,324 general practice (GP) premises. This data has been sourced from NHS England and only includes main practices. More data is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/general-and-personal-medical-services/2004-2014-as-at-30-september>

**Lewis Cocking:**

[9245]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of giving the responsibility for the allocation of GP surgeries to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

There are currently no plans for assessing whether the responsibility of the allocation of general practice surgeries should fall to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Upper-tier local authorities currently have a role in improving health and influencing health and care strategies through participation in integrated care partnerships (ICPs) and integrated care boards (ICBs). ICBs are National Health Service organisations responsible for planning health services for their local population, including Primary Medical Services. ICBs are legally required to have local government representation on their board. Each integrated care system (ICS) includes an ICP, formed of NHS organisations and upper-tier local authorities, which is responsible for developing an integrated care strategy. The ICB works to deliver this through developing a joint plan with partner local authorities, managing the NHS budget, and arranging for the provision of health services in the ICS area.

The healthcare needs of local populations affect the funding which practices receive. Global sum payments for general practice contractors are based on a weighted sum for every person registered with the practice, using the Carr-Hill formula to estimate the practices' workload.

## ■ Hospitals: Newbury

**Mr Lee Dillon:**

[\[10249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to support NHS services in Newbury, in the context of his Department's review of the New Hospital Programme.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government recognises that delivering high quality National Health Services requires the right facilities and support systems in the right places. We understand that investment in capital projects, whether through allocations prioritised locally or through national programmes, is important in achieving this.

We inherited a New Hospital Programme which was delayed and the funding for which ran out in March. We are reviewing it to provide people in Newbury and across the country with a realistic and costed timetable for delivery. Newbury is served by the Royal Berkshire Hospital scheme which is in scope of the review. The review is feeding into the Spending Review process where the Government will confirm the outcome.

Managing the local capital budget for its area and reconfiguring services, which includes addressing estates issues, as well as allocating funds according to local priorities, including investment to support healthcare services, are matters for local NHS organisations. Any future national capital programmes to support NHS organisations delivering local and national priorities will also be considered as part of the Spending Review process.

## ■ Infant Foods

**Kim Johnson:**

[\[10507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish guidance on the sugar and salt content of baby foods.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

A 2019 evidence review showed that babies and young children are exceeding their energy intake requirement and are eating too much sugar and salt. Some commercial baby foods, particularly finger foods, had added sugar or salt, or contained ingredients that are high in sugar or salt.

More recently, the independent Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) highlighted in their report on Feeding Young Children aged 1-5 years, published in 2023, that free sugar intakes are above recommendations for children at all ages where recommendations have been set; and that commercial baby food and drinks contributed to around 20% of free sugar intake in children aged between 12 and 18 months old. SACN also recommended that in diets of children aged between one and five years old, foods, including snacks that are high in salt, free sugars, saturated fat, or are energy dense should be limited and that commercially manufactured foods and

drinks marketed specifically for infants and young children are not needed to meet nutrition requirements.

We face a childhood obesity crisis, and the Government is committed to raising the healthiest next generation. We can therefore confirm that we will publish voluntary industry guidelines to limit the levels of salt and sugar in commercially available baby food and drink in the near future.

## ■ Medicine: Research

**Sarah Owen:**

[\[10148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much the National Institute for Health and Care Research has spent on research into (a) gynaecological and urogynaecological health, (b) asthma and (c) diabetes in each of the last ten years; and what proportion of the NIHR's overall spend each of those amounts represents.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

*[Holding answer 28 October 2024]:* The following table shows how much the National Institute for Health and Care Research spent on research, as well as that spend as a percentage of total research spend, for gynaecological and urogynaecological, each year from 2014/15 to 2023/34, and in total over that period:

FINANCIAL YEAR	SPEND	PROPORTION OF TOTAL RESEARCH SPEND
2014/15	£3,820,598	1.3%
2015/16	£4,119,736	1.4%
2016/17	£4,598,586	1.6%
2017/18	£5,794,355	1.5%
2018/19	£4,876,814	1.3%
2019/20	£5,558,241	1.3%
2020/21	£5,255,747	1.3%
2021/22	£5,808,297	1.2%
2022/23	£5,472,805	1.0%
2023/24	£6,381,906	1.3%
Total 2014 to 2024	£51,687,086	1.3%

Additionally, the following table shows how much the National Institute for Health and Care Research spent on research, as well as that spend as a percentage of total

research spend, for asthma, each year from 2014/15 to 2023/24, and in total over that period:

FINANCIAL YEAR	SPEND	PROPORTION OF TOTAL RESEARCH SPEND
2014/15	£2,881,919	1.0%
2015/16	£3,148,352	1.1%
2016/17	£2,222,035	0.8%
2017/18	£4,451,842	1.2%
2018/19	£4,999,804	1.3%
2019/20	£8,823,017	2.1%
2020/21	£8,950,535	2.2%
2021/22	£7,378,125	1.5%
2022/23	£6,947,881	1.3%
2023/24	£8,733,915	1.7%
Total 2014 to 2024	£58,537,425	1.5%

Finally, the following table shows how much the National Institute for Health and Care Research spent on research, as well as that spend as a percentage of total research spend, for diabetes, each year from 2014/15 to 2023/24, and in total over that period:

FINANCIAL YEAR	SPEND	PROPORTION OF TOTAL RESEARCH SPEND
2014/15	£8,886,001	3.1%
2015/16	£8,570,471	2.9%
2016/17	£8,899,325	3.0%
2017/18	£12,240,087	3.3%
2018/19	£13,180,008	3.4%
2019/20	£17,097,212	4.1%
2020/21	£16,899,589	4.1%
2021/22	£21,713,745	4.3%
2022/23	£20,346,333	3.8%

FINANCIAL YEAR	SPEND	PROPORTION OF TOTAL RESEARCH SPEND
2023/24	£25,271,594	5.1%
Total 2014 to 2024	£153,104,366	3.8%

## ■ Menopause: Health Services

**Alex Sobel:**

**[11311]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of a permanent national menopause network supported by specialist nurses to (a) support and (b) offer advice on (i) diet, (ii) exercise, (iii) the workplace and (iv) other issues to people going through the menopause.

**Karin Smyth:**

No specific assessment has been made. The Government sympathises with the difficulties women experiencing menopausal symptoms face, and we are committed to prioritising women's health as we reform the National Health Service.

The NHS website provides information and advice for women on menopause symptoms, healthcare support, including treatment options, and advice on lifestyles changes, including diet and exercise. NHS England has also developed a self-care fact sheet. This fact sheet is available at the following link:

<https://www.selfcareforum.org/menopause/>

Women should not have to suffer in silence and anyone needing advice on managing symptoms should seek advice from their general practitioner or other healthcare professional. In addition, the Department has invested £25 million over 2023/24 and 2024/25 to support the establishment of at least one pilot women's health hub in every integrated care system. Menopause care is a core service for the pilot women's health hubs.

## ■ Mental Health Act 1983

**Abtisam Mohamed:**

**[11096]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when his Department plans to bring forward legislative proposals to update the Mental Health Act 1983.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Mental Health Bill announced in the King's Speech will deliver the Government's commitment to modernise the Mental Health Act 1983. The bill will be published when Parliamentary time allows.

**■ NHS: Translation Services****Rupert Lowe:** [\[10318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much has been spent on (a) translation and (b) interpretation in the NHS in each of the last five years.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department does not hold this information. This information will be held by integrated care boards.

**■ Parents: Health Services****Mr Lee Dillon:** [\[11134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that new parents receive adequate support.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Government has an ambition to achieve the healthiest generation of children ever. A strong child health focus will need to underpin both the Health and Opportunity Missions.

The zero- to five-year-olds element of the Healthy Child Programme is a universal, personalised service, led by health visitors and family nurses, for new parents, and reaches 97% of families. Every family should be offered five visits, including antenatal and new birth contact, alongside targeted support for families who require additional help. £3.6 billion was allocated to local authorities through the Public Health Grant in 2024/25, which is used to fund the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme.

The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme provides support for babies and their families in the critical 1,001 days from conception to the age of two. It provides approximately £300 million over three years to 75 local authorities in England with high levels of deprivation to create a network of Family Hubs, with Start for Life services at its core. Support for new parents and carers with babies includes: perinatal mental health support and services, to promote positive early relationships; face-to-face and virtual infant feeding services; and increased capacity for the National Breastfeeding Helpline.

The Healthy Start scheme, introduced in 2006, encourages a healthy diet for pregnant women, babies, and young children under four years old from very low-income households.

**■ Radiotherapy: Medical Equipment****Sir John Hayes:** [\[11155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of radiotherapy treatment machines in England.



**Karin Smyth:**

The Government knows that cancer patients are waiting too long for a diagnosis and treatment. We will get the National Health Service diagnosing cancer on time, diagnosing it earlier, and treating it faster, so that more patients survive this horrible set of diseases, and we will improve patients' experience across the system. As part of this, we are committed to bringing down waits for cancer appointments with a Fit for the Future fund, providing investment for the number of computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, and other tests that are needed to reduce elective and cancer waiting times, thereby saving lives.

The Government will continue to support the provision of radiotherapy machines, however, since April 2022 the responsibility for investing in new radiotherapy machines has been with local systems.

**Radiotherapy: Rural Areas****Sir John Hayes:**[\[11156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will have discussions with NHS England on improving access to radiotherapy treatments for cancer patients in rural areas.

**Karin Smyth:**

NHS England and the integrated care boards are responsible for ensuring that the healthcare needs of local communities are met. These responsibilities include considering adequate healthcare provision, care, and wider support for local populations, including in remote and rural areas.

For those who may struggle to access treatment, the NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme provides financial assistance to patients in England who do not have a medical need for transport, but who require assistance with the costs of travelling to receive certain National Health Services. The NHS Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services provide funded transport where a medical condition means that a patient would struggle to safely attend their treatment independently.

**Sepsis****Lee Anderson:**[\[8861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will run a national campaign to raise awareness of sepsis.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

Local National Health Service trusts may already choose to run local public awareness campaigns on sepsis.

Recent evidence suggests that there is high awareness of sepsis among the general public. The Department is focused on improving the clinical awareness and recognition of sepsis by healthcare professionals, so that unwell and deteriorating patients are identified promptly and started on life-saving treatment.

NHS England has launched several training programmes aimed at improving the diagnosis and early management of sepsis. These programmes are regularly reviewed and revised with support from subject matter experts as new national sepsis guidance is implemented.

### ■ Social Workers: Apprentices

**Nadia Whittome:** [\[9964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the written statement of 30 July 2024 on Adult Social Care Workforce, HCWS50, whether he plans to provide further funding for social work apprentice opportunities.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 23 October 2024]:* We take seriously our responsibility to help manage down the overall fiscal pressures in 2024/25, and therefore cannot commit further funding for social work apprenticeships at this time.

Regarding the social care sector more generally, we are committed to building consensus on the long-term reform needed to create the National Care Service. A key step towards this will be introducing Fair Pay Agreements into the sector, which will work to empower worker representatives, employers and others in partnership to negotiate pay and terms and conditions in a regulated and responsible manner and will help to address the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector; in turn supporting the delivery of high-quality care.

### ■ South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

**Rachael Maskell:** [\[9722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to publish an evaluation of the effectiveness of the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust community health service pilot at assisting users with employment matters.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 22 October 2024]:* NHS England has advised that an external evaluation of the pilots will be procured that includes early feedback to pilot sites to enable them to respond in a timely manner to early findings and learning. No decisions have yet been made on when the outcomes of this evaluation might be made available.

### ■ Surgical Hubs

**Victoria Atkins:** [\[11320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many procedures were delivered by surgical hubs opened since the 2021 Spending Review, as of 4 July 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

Between the 2021 Spending Review and 4 July 2024, 18 new Targeted Investment Fund (TIF2) funded surgical hubs have opened. Elective Hub data is only available from April 2024, when the Elective Hub dashboard was established.

Of the 18 new TIF2 funded surgical hubs, only 11 surgical hubs are reporting data. This data shows that between 1 April 2024 and 1 July 2024 the 11 reporting surgical hubs have delivered 18,403 procedures.

Between 30 April 2021 and 30 June 2024, the elective waiting list increased by 2,499,232 from 5,123,717 to 7,622,949.

**Victoria Atkins:**[\[11321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many procedures were delivered by surgical hubs opened since 27 October 2021 in (a) January, (b) February, (c) March, (d) April, (e) May, (f) June and (g) July 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

Between October 2021 and 4 July 2024, 18 new Targeted Investment Fund (TIF2) funded surgical hubs have opened. Elective Hub data is only available from April 2024, when the Elective Hub dashboard was established.

Of the 18 new TIF2 funded surgical hubs, only 11 surgical hubs are reporting data. The data shows that 6,302 surgical procedures were delivered by the 11 reporting hubs in April 2024; 6,142 in May 2024, and; 5,959 in June 2024. There were 7,572,563 pathways on the elective waiting list in April 2024; 7,603,812 in May 2024; 7,622,949 in June 2024 and 7,624,600 in July 2024.

**HOME OFFICE****■ Asylum: Hotels****Steve Race:**[\[11084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to end the use of hotel accommodation for women and girls seeking asylum.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

We are working to fix the asylum system, clearing the backlog to reduce demand on accommodation and ending the use of hotels, including for women and girls.

**■ Demonstrations: Hezbollah****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[11351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance her Department issues to police forces on expressions of support for Hezbollah during protests.

**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[11352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance her Department issues to police forces on expressions of support for Hamas during protests.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Government takes proscription offences extremely seriously. Hezbollah is proscribed in its entirety and once an organisation is proscribed, it is an offence to express support for the organisation. It is for the police to determine if an offence has been committed.

The College of Policing is responsible for providing guidance to frontline officers to ensure all officers have the latest information, advice and support to deal with proscription offences. The College of Policing are operationally independent from Government.

**■ Draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill**

**Neil Coyle:** [\[11312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to clause 2 of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill, for what reason venues with a 100 person capacity will be excluded from full risk assessments.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[11313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the effectiveness of the pilot implementation of provisions relating to the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill by local authorities.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[11314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to provide access to training for premises covered by the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.

**Neil Coyle:** [\[11315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will consult Pool Reinsurance Limited on the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.

**Dan Jarvis:**

As a result of pre-legislative scrutiny, and extensive consultation in relation to proposals for the standard tier, the Government made significant changes to the Bill. This was to ensure public protection outcomes can be achieved whilst avoiding undue burdens on businesses and other organisations. This includes raising the standard tier threshold from 100 to 200.

Lowering the minimum threshold for the standard tier back to 100 would result in significant changes to the coverage of the Bill and increased costs to business. Government believes a threshold of 200 achieves an appropriate balance between protecting the public from the risk of physical harm and imposing burden on business, whilst continuing to deliver the Bill's overall aims of increasing protective security and organisational preparedness across the UK.

We will continue to liaise with all relevant stakeholders as the Bill progresses.

## ■ Electric Bicycles and Motorcycles: Crime

**Luke Taylor:**

[\[10877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help tackle (a) moped and (b) illegal e-bike related crimes.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

This government is determined to crack down on snatch theft and other crimes, including those facilitated by mopeds and e-bikes, that make people feel unsafe in our communities.

We are committed to strengthening neighbourhood policing, recruiting and putting thousands of additional officers back on the beat to provide a visible presence in our communities, and tackle all forms of street crime.

Tackling the market for stolen goods and making these crimes less attractive to commit in the first place, is a key part of our approach. As announced last month, the Home Office is engaging with tech companies to see what more can be done to break the business model of mobile phone thieves.

The police may, when appropriate, pursue mopeds and e-bikes, and may employ tactical options to bring the vehicle to a stop. The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on Roads Policing Police Pursuits provides guidance for police pursuits.

## ■ Homelessness

**Neil Coyle:**

[\[11303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many assessments for destitution her Department has made for people subject to No Recourse to Public Funds conditions in each of the last ten years.

**Seema Malhotra:**

We do not routinely publish the information you have requested, and we are unable to provide this information, as it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

When an individual goes through the process of assessment for Change of Conditions, various No Recourse to Public Funds conditions are checked, with 'destitution' being one of these conditions.

## ■ Immigration: Lebanon

**Steve Witherden:**

[\[10663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of implementing a (a) resettlement and (b) reunification scheme for non-UK citizens in Lebanon who have siblings in (i) the UK and (ii) Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr constituency.

**Seema Malhotra:**

We are monitoring the deeply concerning situation in Lebanon closely and keeping all existing pathways under review.

Lebanese nationals who wish to join family members in the UK can do so via the existing range of routes available.

Any application for a UK visa will be assessed against the requirements of the Immigration Rules. Immediate family members of British citizens and those settled in the UK who wish to come and live in the UK can apply under one of the existing family visa routes.

**Police: Misconduct****Mr Richard Holden:****[11171]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many police officers are not able to have contact with the public due to ongoing misconduct investigations in each police force; and for how long the ten police officers who have not been able to have contact with the public for the longest period have been in this position.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Home Office does not routinely collect data on the number of police officers who are prevented from having contact with the public due to on-going misconduct investigations, nor the length of time such restrictions have been in place

The number of police officers subject to misconduct investigations in the financial year is published on an annual basis within the 'Police misconduct, England and Wales' statistical bulletin, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-misconduct-statistics>

In addition, the number of officers who are suspended as at the 31 March in each financial year is published within the 'Police workforce, England and Wales' statistical bulletin, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-workforce-england-and-wales>.

**Terrorism****Rupert Lowe:****[11104]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many terrorist plots there have been by the ideology of the perpetrators in each of the last five years.

**Dan Jarvis:**

On 08 October, DG MI5 gave his latest update on the current national security threats facing the UK.

During his annual threat report, he outlined that since March 2017, MI5 and the police have together disrupted 43 late-stage attack plots.

**HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT****■ Building Alterations: Planning Permission****Sir Julian Lewis:****[11218]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will remove the presumption in favour of granting planning permission for developments which build extra stories on top of occupied apartment blocks.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

As set out in our consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, the government supports upward extensions as a route to urban intensification. Planning policy makes clear that local authorities should support upward extensions where the development would be consistent with the prevailing height and form, well designed (including complying with any local design policies and standards), and can maintain safe access and egress for occupiers.

The government will keep recent changes to permitted development rights under review and as per my response to the right hon. Gentleman's oral question on Monday 28 October 2024 ( [Official Report HC, Volume 755, Column 524](#) ), I will reflect further on the specific concern he has raised.

**■ Buildings: Safety****Mike Amesbury:****[10766]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of increasing the scope of the Building Safety Levy to include all parties responsible for the (a) planning, (b) design, (c) construction and (d) insurance of unsafe buildings.

**Alex Norris:**

This Government will put a renewed focus on ensuring those responsible for the building safety crisis pay to put it right. The Building Safety Levy will be charged on building control applications for the purpose of meeting building safety expenditure, ensuring that those responsible pay to put it right, whilst the burden of paying for fixing historical building safety defects does not fall on leaseholders or further burden taxpayers.

**Mike Amesbury:****[11032]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of appointing a building safety tsar to develop a building safety remediation programme to ensure that companies responsible for poor building safety (a) undertake any necessary remediation work and (b) pay compensation to homeowners and leaseholders in those buildings.

**Alex Norris:**

Since the Grenfell fire we have introduced funded remediation programmes to tackle historical safety defects. In addition, the National Building Safety Regulator, led by

the Chief Inspector for Buildings ensures new buildings are designed, constructed and managed safely. They are also taking enforcement action against those that do not remediate their high-rise buildings.

54 of the largest developers have signed the [developer remediation contract](#) committing them to carrying out all necessary work to address life-critical fire-safety defects arising from the design, construction or refurbishment of buildings 11 metres and over in height that they developed or refurbished in England over the 30 years ending on 4 April 2022. Between them, they have taken responsibility for the remediation of more than 1,600 buildings at a cost to themselves of around £3.3 billion. Developers face significant consequences if they fail to comply with their contractual obligations.

Further steps to increase the pace of remediation will be set out soon.

The Building Safety Act introduced powers that allows any interested person to recover costs incurred for the remediation of a building via Remediation Contribution Orders. Further, where remediation is needed and not progressing due to the building owner's inaction, Remediation Orders (ROs) can be sought to require a building owner fix their building. The courts have also been granted new powers to extend civil liability for defects to companies associated with either the landlord or developer. In addition to the Building Safety Act, local regulators can utilise powers under the Housing Act 2004 (Local Authorities) or Fire Safety Order 2005 (Fire and Rescue Services) to force a building owner to fix identified defects in a building within a set timescale.

Protections under the Building Safety Act 2022 ensure that qualifying leaseholders will only be required to make capped contributions towards relevant, non-cladding defects and interim measures and in some cases will be exempt from all costs.

## ■ Council Tax: Students

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[11485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential (a) merits of removing students from council tax and (b) impact of removing students from council tax on routine (i) services and (ii) maintenance.

**Jim McMahon:**

Full-time students are generally disregarded for council tax purposes. Where all residents of a dwelling are disregarded, due to being full-time students, the dwelling will be exempt from council tax. Additionally, where a hall of residence is provided predominantly for the accommodation of students it will also be exempt for council tax purposes.



## ■ Floods: Housing

**Stuart Anderson:** [\[10772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on decreasing the number of properties required to trigger the flooding recovery framework.

**Alex Norris:**

The Flood Recovery Framework provides swift, responsive financial support packages to communities, households and businesses suffering the impacts of severe flooding with schemes from MHCLG, DBT and Defra. A review of the Framework is currently underway and we expect this to report on progress later in the autumn.

## ■ Homelessness: Northern Ireland

**Jim Shannon:** [\[10727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions her Department has had with the Department of Communities in Northern Ireland on tackling homelessness.

**Rushanara Ali:**

MHCLG Ministers and officials engage regularly with their counterparts in the devolved administrations to discuss a range of issues, including tackling homelessness.

## ■ Leasehold: Buildings

**Ruth Cadbury:** [\[11306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the number of leasehold properties in England which contain Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete.

**Alex Norris:**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government does not gather data on the number of leasehold properties which contain Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). However, our current assessment is that prevalence of RAAC is low in housing.

All building owners should continue to manage building safety and performance risks of all kinds in their buildings, including RAAC, in a proportionate, risk-based, and evidence-based manner. To do so, they should continue to follow guidance published by the Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE) to identify, assess, and manage issues relating to RAAC.

## ■ Local Plans

**Clive Jones:** [\[11148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7096 on Local Plans, for what reason she chose the local authorities to which she has written to ask for Local Growth Plans.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Government has been clear that, as local leaders who know their areas best, Mayors are key partners in delivering the national growth mission. That is why we are committed to transferring power out of Westminster and into local communities, devolving powers to local leaders. Local Growth Plans will be central to putting this new partnership into action.

We recognise there are growth opportunities across the country and the new Industrial Strategy will unleash the full potential of our cities and regions, concentrating efforts on places with the greatest potential for our growth sectors: city regions, high-potential clusters, and strategic industrial sites.

## ■ Social Rented Housing: Waiting Lists

**Dr Neil Hudson:** [\[11383\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support councils to reduce social housing waiting lists.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government has committed to delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation.

On 30 July we announced a number of changes in planning policy designed to support the delivery of affordable homes. We also confirmed a range of new flexibilities for councils and housing associations, both within the Affordable Homes Programme and in relation to how councils can use their Right to Buy receipts, and a further £450 million for councils through the Local Authority Housing Fund enabling councils to grow their housing stock.

At the Budget on 30 October, the Chancellor set out details of an immediate one-year cash injection of £500 million to top up the existing Affordable Homes Programme which will deliver up to 5,000 new social and affordable homes. This comes ahead of the multi-year Spending Review next spring, where the Government will set out details of new investment to succeed the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme.

The Chancellor also confirmed that we will reduce Right to Buy discounts to their pre-2012 regional levels and allow councils to retain 100% of the receipts generated by Right to Buy sales.

In addition, the government will consult on a new 5-year social housing rent settlement to provide the sector with the certainty it needs to invest in new social housing.

**■ Towns Fund: Runcorn****Mike Amesbury:**[\[10761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department's planned timetable is to award Runcorn with the initial allocation of funding from the Long Term Plan for Towns scheme.

**Alex Norris:**

This Government is committed to delivering growth in every corner of the country, by empowering communities to find local solutions to national priorities.

The department will set out further details on funding, next steps, and confirmation of the revised timelines for the programme in due course.

**■ Wealth: Cornwall****Ben Maguire:**[\[10953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the disparity in wealth of the wealthiest 10% of the population and the average household on (a) economic prosperity, (b) productivity and (c) social cohesion in Cornwall.

**Alex Norris:**

This Government is committed to improving the living standards of the average household across the United Kingdom. The Employment Rights Bill will upgrade the UK labour market to make it fit for our modern economy, driving business growth and tackling poor productivity through providing greater security to working people.

We believe that economic prosperity, productivity, and social cohesion are best addressed by devolving powers to local areas who best understand the needs of their communities. Cornwall's recently announced Level 2 devolution agreement is the start of that journey to move more powers from Whitehall to local people in Cornwall. Local authorities will be given new powers to address the challenge of short-term lets and second homes which are a particular challenge in Cornwall.

**JUSTICE****■ Courts: Northern Ireland****Jim Shannon:**[\[10725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent discussions she has had with the Justice Minister in Northern Ireland on backlogs in court cases.

**Heidi Alexander:**

The Lord Chancellor has not yet had the opportunity to discuss the courts and tribunals across England and Wales, including the backlogs that some jurisdictions face, with the Northern Ireland Justice Minister. Ministry of Justice ministers are hopeful that they will have the opportunity to discuss courts throughput with the

Justice Minister soon, either bilaterally or through the Inter-Ministerial Group for Justice.

### ■ Courts: Translation Services

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[11105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much was spent on (a) translation and (b) interpretation costs in (i) all courts and (ii) Great Yarmouth Magistrates court in each of the last five years.

**Heidi Alexander:**

This question has been interpreted to mean spend for all language services, both translation and interpretation provided in a court setting, and for printed materials available in HMCTS buildings.

Information is not held disaggregated as (a) translation and (b) interpretation but has been provided in total.

The total spend by HMCTS on translation and interpretation in each of the last five financial years was:

FINANCIAL YEAR	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total Cost	11,000,691	13,007,403	7,094,093	10,788,205	11,489,997	12,774,105

These figures do not include any translation or interpretation spend covered by Legal Aid Agency central funds as these are not included in the accounts for HM Courts and Tribunals Service.

It is vital that victims, witnesses and defendants understand what is happening in court to ensure justice is done, and we will always take steps to ensure a qualified interpreter is provided when needed.

The total spend by HMCTS on translation and interpretation for Great Yarmouth Magistrates Court in each of the last five financial years was:

FINANCIAL YEAR	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total Cost	88	0	0	0	0	0

These figures do not include any translation or interpretation spend covered by Legal Aid Agency central funds as these are not included in the accounts for HM Courts and Tribunals Service.

## ■ Crime: Victims

**Mark Swards:**

[\[11120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing legislation to allow victims of crime to express impact statements to convicted people directly.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

As set out in the Victims' Code, victims and survivors have the right to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) to explain in their own words how a crime has affected them. The judge or magistrate will decide whether and what sections of a personal statement should be read aloud at the sentencing hearing. The judge or magistrate will always take the victim's preference into account when making their decision, unless there is good reason not to do so. The entitlement to make a VPS at the sentencing hearing is enabled by a Criminal Practice Direction; this provides guidance to judges and specifies that the court will take the VPS into account when determining sentence, as well as additional procedure surrounding the VPS.

Where the statement is read out and the offender is at the sentencing hearing they will hear the statement directly. We recognise that for some victims and survivors it may be distressing where the offender is not at the hearing and the Government is committed to legislating to require offenders to attend their sentencing hearings, so that criminals hear first-hand the impacts of their crime and victims, survivors and bereaved family members of deceased victims see criminals face the consequences of their actions. This measure will be included in the Victims, Courts and Public Protection Bill, which the Government intends to introduce in the first parliamentary session.

## ■ Crime: Young People

**David Williams:**

[\[10923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle youth (a) offending and (b) re-offending.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Government is committed to intervening early to stop young people being drawn into crime with an ambition to halve knife crime in a decade, accompanied by a new, increased focus on crime prevention. The 'Safer Streets' mission proposes a prevention-first approach to crime reduction and fundamental to this will be the delivery of the Youth Futures Programme. This will consist of the creation of prevention partnerships in each local authority to map existing youth provisions and at-risk individuals, as well as the implementation of early intervention strategies to stop young people being pulled into a life of crime, supported by a network of Young Futures Hubs.

This will build on the Ministry of Justice's Turnaround programme, which is providing Youth Offending Teams across England and Wales with funding to intervene earlier

with children on the cusp of entering the youth justice system, with the aim of preventing them from offending or reoffending.

We know that community options can be more effective at reducing reoffending and so we believe that, wherever appropriate, children should be diverted from custody. To this end, we are currently piloting changes to intensive youth community sentences that aim to give courts confidence in using them as robust alternatives to custody. We have also recently opened the first secure school which aims to reduce the reoffending rates of those children who have been sent to custody by placing education at the heart of the establishment.

## ■ Criminal Records

**Dr Kieran Mullan:**

[\[10802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the guidance by her Department entitled *Disclosing your criminal record*, published on 28 October 2023, on what evidential basis the guidance says that one in four people of working age have a criminal record.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The statistic that approximately one in four people have a criminal record is based on Home Office data on the Police National Computer compared with population data.

An updated estimate of the number of individuals of working age (16-64 and 16+) with a nominal record on the Police National Computer was published on 28 October 2024. The data can be found here: [Number of working-age individuals with a record on the PNC - GOV.UK.](#)

## ■ Crown Court: Working Hours

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[10681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans her Department has to increase the number of daily sitting hours by Crown Court judges.

**Heidi Alexander:**

There are no current plans to extend the standard sitting hours of the Crown Court.

The Lord Chancellor has a statutory duty to ensure there is an effective and efficient system to support the carrying on of the businesses of the courts, and that appropriate services are provided for those courts.

Alongside this, the way in which an individual sitting day is used with regards to the scheduling and sequencing of cases at the Crown Court is at the discretion of the independent judiciary. In addition to time spent hearing cases in the court room, at either end of the day judges will spend time on other judicial business including reading case files in preparation for the hearing and other aspects of case management. As a result, the hours of a given sitting day can vary from day to day.

We recognise that the Crown Court outstanding caseload remains one of the biggest challenges facing the Criminal Justice System and we are committed to reducing the caseload and bringing waiting times down.

This Government has increased the number of Crown Court sitting days to 106,500, more than in six out of the last seven years. And we will soon extend magistrates' sentencing powers from 6 to 12 months, freeing up 2,000 days in the Crown Courts to handle the most serious cases.

Alongside this, we invest consistently in the recruitment of c.1,000 judges and tribunal members across all jurisdictions annually. Crown Court recruitment has been a particular priority and we have successfully increased the number of Circuit judges and Recorders in recent years.

### ■ **Domestic Abuse: Administration of Justice**

**Andrew Cooper:**

[\[11445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking with the Attorney General to speed up the justice system for victims of domestic violence.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

This Government inherited a record and rising court backlogs which have seen too many victims waiting far too long for justice.

We are committed to bearing down on the court backlog to speed up the delivery of justice.

Timely and effective justice is key to increasing the confidence of victims and survivors in the justice system. Strengthening the justice system response to domestic abuse and increasing victim confidence are crucial to achieving this Government's ambitious commitment to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) this decade.

The decision on when and where a case is listed is the responsibility of the independent judiciary, although judges do look to prioritise cases involving vulnerable complainants and witnesses, such as victims and survivors of domestic abuse, wherever possible.

In addition, CPS, NPCC and College of Policing's Joint Justice Plan aims to transform how the police and the CPS investigate and prosecute domestic abuse cases, including a commitment to improve the timelessness and effectiveness of investigating and charging in domestic abuse cases. I look forward to the publication of this plan in November.

### ■ **Members' Constituency Work: Henley and Thame**

**Freddie van Mierlo:**

[\[11517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will meet the Hon. Member for Henley and Thame to discuss an urgent constituency matter.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Ministry of Justice Ministerial team conducts engagement with Members on their constituency matters on a routine basis and I would encourage the Member to contact the relevant Minister through the usual channels.

**Ministry of Justice: Ministers' Private Offices****Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[9269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, 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.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

The Ministry of Justice's total cost spent on refurbishments to ministerial private offices, including new furniture and fittings, over this period is £13,314.73, of which £12,578.31 was for painting, installation of new electrical sockets, reconfiguration of existing furniture, removing TV cabling from a wall to move to another room and other redecoration works. The remaining was spent on a new chair, a freezer, two bookcases, and three standing mirrors.

**Open Prisons: Prisoner Escapes****Sir John Hayes:**[\[10676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people have escaped from Category D prisons in the last 10 years.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

An escape that does not involve overcoming a physical security restraint or barrier (such as that provided by a wall or fence, locks, bolts or bars, a secure vehicle, handcuffs or the direct supervision of staff) is classified as an abscond. By definition, absconds are only possible from prisons with open conditions (Category D).

Data on absconds are published annually in the HMPPS Annual Digest. The requested information can be found via the following link: [Absconds Data](#).

Public protection is our top priority. When a prisoner absconds, police are immediately notified and are responsible for locating the offender. The majority of absconders are quickly recaptured and returned to custody.

Those who abscond face serious consequences, including being returned to closed prison conditions, where they may serve up to two additional years on conviction.

**Personal Independence Payment: Appeals****Jayne Kirkham:**[\[11504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to reduce the waiting time for PIP appeal hearings.



**Heidi Alexander:**

We are working to reduce the outstanding caseload in the Social Entitlement Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal. Reducing outstanding caseloads is the key measure to bringing down the waiting times for tribunal hearings.

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

Data on Tribunals performance is published by the Ministry of Justice on a quarterly basis. Receipts, disposals and the outstanding caseload for individual Chambers in the First-tier Tribunal and Upper Tribunal, the Employment Tribunal and the Employment Appeal Tribunal can be found at the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tribunals-statistics>.

**Prisoners' Release****Sir John Hayes:**[\[10672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will publish the offences committed by prisoners released under the early release scheme.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

SDS40 applies to standard determinate sentences, but certain offences have been excluded from the SDS change. the following offences are excluded: Sex offences irrespective of sentence length; serious violent offences with a sentence of four years or more; specified offences linked to domestic abuse irrespective of sentence length (including stalking, coercive or controlling behaviour and non-fatal strangulation); as well as offences concerning national security.

The change will also not apply to sentences subject to release at the discretion of the Parole Board or to offences which currently attract the automatic release from an SDS at the two-thirds point (certain serious sexual and violent offences).

**NORTHERN IRELAND****Public Sector: Northern Ireland****Sorcha Eastwood:**[\[11089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what role he plans his Department will have in supporting the work of the Northern Ireland Transformation Board.

**Hilary Benn:**

The establishment of a Public Service Transformation Board was a condition of the Government's £3.3bn restoration package for the Northern Ireland Executive, which included £235m of funding specifically for the transformation of public services. The Board will include a wide range of independent experts, and be supported by officials

from NICS and UKG, to provide strategic advice to the Executive on how to transform public services.

The Executive will need to make difficult choices in order to live within their budget to support the cost of public service delivery and improve outcomes for citizens. The Government wants to work collaboratively to support the Executive to achieve this while respecting the devolved settlement.

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### ■ Artificial Intelligence: Training

**Dame Caroline Dinéage:**

[\[10696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies of the open letter entitled Statement on AI Training, published on 23 October 2024.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts, and Tourism and I held roundtables with the creative, media and AI sectors last month and our departments continue to engage with those stakeholders to inform our approach. The Statement on AI Training provides the views of individual creators and performers from across the sector and will also inform our approach alongside our engagement with the AI and broader creative industries sectors.

The Government is committed to supporting the growth of the creative industries and AI sectors while recognising the value of human-centred creativity. Whilst clarity is needed, this is a complex topic, and we must take the time to hear stakeholder views and give them careful consideration.

### ■ Broadband

**Dr Rupa Huq:**

[\[10745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to support the rollout of full-fibre broadband.

**Chris Bryant:**

The Government is committed to the rollout of fast, reliable broadband to all parts of the UK. As of February 2024, over 1 million premises had been upgraded to gigabit-capable broadband through government-funded programmes. In total, 36 Project Gigabit contracts have now been signed, to connect over 1 million more homes and businesses, with more contracts to be awarded in the coming months.

### ■ Broadband: Colne Valley

**Paul Davies:**

[\[10893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help improve broadband connections in Colne Valley constituency.

**Chris Bryant:**

According to the independent website ThinkBroadband.com, almost 98% of premises in the Colne Valley constituency have access to superfast broadband speeds ( $\geq 30$  Mbps) and over 85% can access a gigabit-capable ( $> 1000$  Mbps) connection.

To extend gigabit-capable coverage further, Quickline is delivering a £60 million contract under Project Gigabit, to bring gigabit-capable broadband to around 28,000 premises across West Yorkshire and parts of North Yorkshire that would otherwise miss out, including in Colne Valley.

**Paul Davies:**[\[10948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that people in Colne Valley constituency can access a 5G signal by 2030.

**Chris Bryant:**

Ofcom reports that basic (non-standalone) 5G is already available outside 83% of premises across the Colne Valley constituency from at least one mobile operator.

But in order to realise the full economic and social benefits of 5G, our ambition is for all populated areas, including those in the Colne Valley, to have higher-quality standalone 5G by 2030.

We work closely with the mobile industry and are committed to ensuring we have the right policy and regulatory framework to support investment and competition in the market. As part of this work, the Government intends to reform the planning system to make it easier to build digital infrastructure.

**■ Broadband: Great Yarmouth****Rupert Lowe:**[\[11107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help improve internet connections in Great Yarmouth constituency.

**Chris Bryant:**

According to the independent website ThinkBroadband.com, over 98% of premises in the Great Yarmouth constituency have access to superfast broadband speeds ( $\geq 30$  Mbps) and 75% can access a gigabit-capable ( $> 1000$  Mbps) connection.

To extend gigabit-capable coverage further, CityFibre is delivering a £114.2 million contract under Project Gigabit, to bring gigabit-capable broadband to around 62,000 premises across Norfolk that would otherwise miss out, including in Great Yarmouth.

**■ Instagram: Politics and Government****Sam Carling:**[\[10824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of recent steps taken by Instagram to limit political

content on levels of democratic engagement; and what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Government recognises the influence major online platforms can have on public discourse. This is why the Online Safety Act gives platforms over a designated threshold (known as 'Category 1 services') new duties to protect journalism and other content of democratic importance on their services. These duties are designed to safeguard pluralism in online debate and ensure that platforms in scope treat democratic content consistently and transparently.

■ **Internet: Regulation**

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**

[11282]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he plans to regulate websites that promote (a) eating disorders, (b) suicide and (c) self harm.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**

[11283]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of regulating websites that promote (a) eating disorders, (b) suicide and (c) self harm.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Online Safety Act requires all in-scope services to swiftly remove illegal content as soon as they become aware of it. This includes content that intentionally encourages or assists suicide and self-harm, including eating disorder behaviours. User-to-user services which are likely to be accessed by children must use highly effective age assurance to prevent children encountering this material.

Search services also have targeted duties that focus on minimising the risk of all users encountering illegal suicide and self-harm search content, and children from harmful but legal suicide and self-harm content.

■ **Mobile Phones: Aerials**

**Paul Davies:**

[11153]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with Ofcom on the adequacy of its reporting on the quality of phone signals for consumers.

**Chris Bryant:**

Far too often the data published by Ofcom does not match consumers' experience of using mobile networks. I wrote to Ofcom in August, asking them to set out steps to improve their mobile coverage reporting. I have also met with the regulator to discuss the concerns raised in my letter, and Ofcom has agreed to explore what steps could reasonably be taken to improve the data.

## ■ Pornography: Internet

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[11361\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to close down online websites and platforms that host illegal pornographic material.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Online Safety Act gives online platforms new duties to tackle illegal content on their services, including illegal pornography. Ofcom as the new regulator for this regime will have extensive enforcement powers if platforms fail to fulfil their duties. These include powers to impose heavy fines on services, and also to apply to the Courts for business disruption measures. These include orders that require third parties to restrict access to non-compliant services in the UK, e.g. blocking via internet access services or app stores. Separate to provisions in the Online Safety Act, the Pornography Review, led by Independent Lead Reviewer Baroness Gabby Bertin, is exploring the effectiveness of regulation, legislation and the law enforcement response to pornography. The government expects the Review to present its final report by the end of the year.

## ■ Social Media: Children

**Laura Kyrke-Smith:**

[\[11151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of conducting research on the impact of social media design on children's mental health.

**Feryal Clark:**

Research is critical to ensure the safety of the products we interact with daily. This includes online platforms.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is considering options for research into the impact being online has on children and will shortly be making announcements.

Alongside this, the Data Use and Access Bill contains a provision granting the Secretary of State power to create a framework enabling researchers to gain privacy-preserving access to online safety related data and conduct vital research into online trends, helping to support future action for a safer online world.

## ■ Telephones: Fraud

**Sarah Owen:**

[\[11322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help tackle fraudulent phone calls.

**Sarah Owen:** [\[11323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with telecoms companies on preventing fraudulent phone calls.

**Chris Bryant:**

The Government takes fraud seriously. DSIT works closely with the Home Office, who are responsible for fraud policy, as well as Ofcom who have duty to ensure that UK numbers are not misused, to ensure telecoms companies are doing all they can to prevent criminals hijacking their networks to reach victims. From January, new Ofcom rules will require operators to block calls from abroad which present as a UK number.

We continue to work with the telecoms sector to ensure that as threats evolve so too does the response.

## ■ Voice over Internet Protocol

**Amanda Hack:** [\[10886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what information his Department holds on whether customers who are required to transition from Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) landline phones to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) landline phones are being offered equivalent phone-only deals.

**Amanda Hack:** [\[10887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department holds data on phone-only Voice over Internet Protocol products available for consumers.

**Amanda Hack:** [\[10888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to ensure those switching from public switched telephone network landline phones to Voice over Internet Protocol landline phones are not sold unnecessary services.

**Chris Bryant:**

The Government engages regularly with communications providers to ensure that the industry-led switch-off of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) proceeds safely and with minimum inconvenience for end users. For many users, the upgrade will only involve unplugging their existing landline phone from the wall and plugging it into the back of their broadband router.

As part of the migration to VoIP, current landline-only consumers do not need to purchase a general broadband connection if they do not want one. Most users can retain the same telephone devices after the migration, but in scenarios where this is not possible, they will receive a replacement device for free. Existing contracts will not increase in price when customers are migrated to VoIP.

The Department does not hold data on the number of landline-only VoIP products but is working with stakeholders to identify those that require additional support during their PSTN migration, including consumers who are dependent on their landline.

## SCOTLAND

### ■ Tourism: Scotland

**Susan Murray:**

[\[11194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on mitigating the potential impact of closing Scottish visitor centres.

**Ian Murray:**

The UK Government recognises the substantial contribution the Scottish tourism industry makes to the UK visitor economy. We are committed to working with industry to strengthen the future of this key sector.

While tourism is devolved, we work closely with the Scottish Government and its agencies to ensure that the sector thrives. This Government will also continue to encourage tourism across the whole of Scotland through our Brand Scotland work to promote Scotland around the world.

## TRANSPORT

### ■ Bus Services: Franchises

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[11500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to ensure that local SME bus operators are able to participate in future bus franchising schemes.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Bus Services Act 2017 already requires an authority to make a statement on how they will facilitate SMEs in service provision as part of the franchising process.

On 9 September 2024, the Department consulted on updates to bus franchising guidance, these updates aim to reduce the technical barriers to franchising and support safer, more accessible services. The Department is currently reviewing the feedback received, including valuable insights from bus operators and organisations representing small-to-medium-sized operators, and will respond shortly.

The Department will continue working with local authorities to develop different franchising models that could be smaller scale, require less financial commitment and support SME participation.

## ■ Bus Services: Regulation

**David Williams:**

[\[10911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to grant local authorities powers to (a) improve and (b) regulate private bus services in areas without bus franchising.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Improving local transport services is a key part of this government's growth mission, and the government has set out plans to deliver better bus services, grow passenger numbers and drive opportunity to under-served regions.

As announced in the King's Speech on 17 July 2024, the government will introduce a Buses Bill later this parliamentary session. The Bill seeks to deliver new powers for local leaders and will empower them to choose the model that works best in their area, whether that be franchising high quality partnerships with private operators, or public ownership.

In addition, government is undertaking a review into Enhanced Partnerships between local authorities and bus operators with a view to strengthening collaboration and delivery.

## ■ Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: Telephone Services

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[11116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the (a) average waiting time for people calling and (b) time people spent on hold for the DVLA was in each of the last five years.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The table below provides the average waiting time, over the last five years, for someone who calls the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) to be connected to an advisor. Please note that the figures for the various years are not directly comparable as the DVLA has moved to a new telephony platform which allows them to manage customer demand in different ways.

FISCAL YEAR	AVERAGE WAITING TIME IN MINUTES
2020-2021	07:16
2021-2022	10:12
2022-2023	09:18
2023-2024	12:55
2024-24 Oct 24	13:22



## ■ Driving Tests: Earley and Woodley

**Yuan Yang:** [\[11515\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help increase availability of practical driving tests in Earley and Woodley.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

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

Measures in place to reduce waiting times for customers, include buying back annual leave from driving examiners (DE), conducting tests outside regular hours, including at weekends and on public holidays and recruiting more DEs.

In its most recent recruitment campaign, DVSA had two successful candidates in Slough and three in Reading, and it has made offers to these prospective DEs. DVSA launched its latest recruitment campaign in September 2024 and is working to recruit three DEs in Farnborough, four in Slough and five into Reading DTC, which serves the areas of Earley and Woodley.

## ■ Office of Rail and Road

**Laurence Turner:** [\[11516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to item 12 of the minutes of the Office of Rail and Road's Board meeting of 25 June 2024, if she will publish (a) the Office of Rail and Road's case to answer letter and (b) the National Highways reply that are referenced in that item.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Office of Rail and Road published the conclusions to its investigation, including these two letters, on its website on 24 July 2024.

Link to (a) the Office of Rail and Road's case to answer letter:

<https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024-05-22-orr-case-to-answer-letter-to-nh.pdf>.

Link to (b) National Highways reply:

<https://www.orr.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024-06-05-nh-response-to-orr-investigation-letter.pdf>.

## ■ Roads

**Rupert Lowe:** [\[11208\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of trends in the level of immigration on the road system.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department models future demand for road transport based on Office for National Statistics population forecasts, which include changes in population arising

from immigration and other demographic change. Furthermore, the Department's Common Analytical Scenarios consider futures that include high or low immigration to enable future uncertainty to be taken into account.

## ■ Roads: Freight

**Dr Kieran Mullan:**

[\[10805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 8568 on Roads: Freight, what steps her Department is taking to support road haulage businesses.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Small businesses including those in the road haulage sector are the beating heart of our communities, and essential to our economic success. This Government will draw on all resources to support these small businesses and boost productivity by delivering commitments made in our nine-point pledge, Plan for Small Business.

We are working on delivering these commitments and announced on 19th September 2024 measures to tackle the scourge of late payments and long payment terms. We are also creating opportunities for UK businesses to compete and supporting small businesses to access the finance they need to scale up and break into new markets.

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government announced continued support for haulage businesses, by extending the 5p fuel duty cut for one year and cancelling the planned inflation increase for 2025-26. This maintains fuel duty rates at the levels set on 23 March 2022 for an additional 12 months and represents a saving of nearly £1,100 for the average HGV in 2025-26.

## ■ Shipping: Carbon Emissions

**Richard Baker:**

[\[900973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he is taking steps with Cabinet colleagues to support the maritime sector to develop clean maritime technologies.

**Mike Kane:**

The Department for Transport's £206m UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions (UK SHORE) programme focuses on accelerating the technology necessary to decarbonise our domestic maritime sector.

UK SHORE interventions address maritime decarbonisation challenges over the full range of technology-readiness levels (TRL) and are being rolled out between 2022 and 2025.

The UK SHORE programme has allocated funding to more than 150 projects and aims to leverage over £100m private investment to support research and development in maritime decarbonisation. The funding benefits all 12 regions in the UK supporting over 350 organisations, including over 200 SMEs.

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

**Victoria Collins:** [\[900971\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on reforms to business rates.

**Steve Darling:** [\[900983\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on reforms to business rates.

**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[900986\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made with Cabinet colleagues of the potential merits of abolishing business rates.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** [\[900988\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made with Cabinet colleagues of the potential merits of abolishing business rates.

**James Murray:**

The government will create a fairer business rates system that protects the high-street, supports investment, and is fit for the 21st century.

Autumn Budget 2024 announced the first steps including an intention to introduce permanently lower multipliers for high street retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties from April 2026. To fund this sustainably the government also intends to introduce a higher multiplier on properties with Rateable Values (RV) of £500,000 or more.

During the interim period, for 2025-26, RHL properties will receive a 40% relief on business rates bills up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business. The small business multiplier paid by properties with RVs below £51,000 will also be frozen for a further year.

The government published a discussion paper at Budget which sets out priority areas for further reform and invites stakeholders to a conversation about transforming the system over the Parliament.

■ **Alcoholic Drinks: Excise Duties**

**Paul Davies:** [\[10880\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department plans to review the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecasting methodology for revenue from alcohol duty tax receipts.

**James Murray:**

The OBR regularly reviews its forecasting methodology. Its forecast is informed by economic factors including real household consumption and underlying trends in alcohol consumption.

The OBR published updated price elasticities for alcohol in July 2024.

**■ Business Rates: Rural Areas****Andrew Bowie:**[\[11325\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact on the economy of raising the threshold of Rural Rates Relief above the rateable value of (a) £8,500 for (i) village general stores, (ii) food shops and (iii) post offices and (b) £12,500 for (A) public houses and (B) petrol stations.

**James Murray:**

Rural Rate Relief aims to ensure that key amenities are available, and community assets protected in rural areas. It provides 100% rate relief for properties that are based in eligible rural areas with populations below 3,000. To be eligible, the business must also be: the only village general store, food shop or post office, with a rateable value of up to £8,500; or the only public house or petrol station, with a rateable value of up to £12,500.

The government is committed to creating a fairer business rates system that protects the high-street, supports investment, and is fit for the 21st century. At Autumn Budget 2024, the government published a discussion paper which sets out priority areas for further reform and invites stakeholders to a conversation about transforming the system over the Parliament.

**■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances****Andrew Bowie:**[\[11324\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the /25 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Rates Relief scheme into 2025/26.

**James Murray:**

At Autumn Budget 2024, the government announced that Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) relief will be extended for 2025-26 at 40% up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business.

**■ Cooperatives****Josh Newbury:**[\[900978\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support the growth of co-operatives.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Government recognises the important contribution of co-operatives to the economy, serving local communities around the UK and ensuring the UK has a diverse business sector with their model of shared ownership. There are currently 7,370 co-operatives operating across the UK, with an annual income of £42.7 billion.

The Government is committed to unlocking the full potential of the mutual and co-operative sector to support inclusive growth and will work with the sector to ensure it is fully supported to grow.

To help ensure co-operatives legislation is meeting the needs of co-operative and community benefit societies, the Government is funding the Law Commission's independent review of the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. This will consider ways to update and modernise the Act.

**■ Cooperatives and Mutual Societies: New Businesses****Gareth Snell:**[\[900981\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support new co-operatives and mutuals.

**Tulip Siddiq:**

The Government recognises the important contribution of co-operatives and mutuals to the economy, serving local communities around the UK and ensuring the UK has a diverse business sector with their model of shared ownership. According to the Co-operative and Mutual Economy Report 2024, there are currently 9,342 mutual and co-operative businesses in the UK, with an annual income of £165.7 billion.

The Government is committed to unlocking the full potential of the mutual and co-operative sector to support inclusive growth and will work with the sector to ensure it is fully supported to grow.

To help ensure co-operatives legislation is meeting the needs of co-operative and community benefit societies, the Government is funding the Law Commission's independent review of the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. This will consider ways to update and modernise the Act.

**■ Digital Technology: Taxation****Manuela Perteghella:**[\[10901\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of increasing the Digital Services Tax.

**James Murray:**

The Chancellor set out her plans on tax at the Budget. The Digital Services Tax (DST) is a 2% tax on digital services providers, and it was implemented in April 2020 as a temporary solution to widely held concerns with international corporate tax.

The UK remains committed to reaching a global solution on the taxation of the digital economy through Pillar 1 of the G20-OECD Inclusive Framework project. It is the UK's intention to repeal the DST when this international solution is in place.

## ■ Economic Situation: Coronavirus

**Manuela Perteghella:**

[\[11347\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to help mitigate the ongoing financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on (a) individuals and (b) small businesses.

**Darren Jones:**

The Government is working to improve living standards for everyone across the country. A new Ministerial Taskforce has been established to develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce child poverty. In addition, the government is introducing a Fair Repayment Rate on debt deductions in Universal Credit (UC), extending the Household Support Fund for another six months until 31 March 2025 – then extending this further for 2025-26, and continuing to make Discretionary Housing Payments in 2025-26. This package – which provides help on debt repayments, help during a crisis, and support for those struggling most with the cost of essentials – will improve economic security and resilience for those who need it most.

The Government has also put growth as its number one mission, which will help families by boosting wages and putting more money in people's pockets. The approach of this government will centre on fostering good work. We will ensure the minimum wage is a true living wage and reform employment support to offer more people the dignity and purpose of meaningful employment.

In relation to small businesses, the government is committed to making it easier for start-ups and scale-ups to access external sources of financial support. This includes extending the Enterprise Investment Scheme and Venture Capital Trust schemes to 2035; committing over £250 million in funding in 2025-26 for the British Business Bank's small business loans programmes; ensuring small businesses can access UK Export Finance's support and exploring the need for new products to support small exporters to access the insurance and finance they need; and publishing post implementation reviews of the Bank Referral Scheme and Commercial Credit Data Sharing Scheme. The government now intends to consult on enhancing both policies to better support SME access to finance.

Late payments can bring cash-flow challenges for small businesses. We have already taken action to tackle late payments through passing additional reporting requirements for large firms in August, and the announcement of a consultation on options to go further. At Budget, we also announced from 1 October 2025, companies bidding for government contracts over £5 million per annum will be excluded from the procurement process if they do not pay their own suppliers within an average of 45 days. The government also views increasing its procurement spend with small businesses as an important economic growth lever, with further details on

implementing this to be set out in the National Procurement Policy Statement next year.

The government will maintain the Corporation Tax Small Profits Rate and marginal relief at their current rate and thresholds. This means 9 in 10 actively trading companies, including a majority of SMEs, will have a Corporation Tax rate lower than 25%. The £1 million Annual Investment Allowance will also be kept in place to provide the certainty businesses need to invest.

## ■ Health Services: Pay

**Jim Allister:**

[\[11216\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the availability of the funding required for the 5.5% pay increase recommended by the Pay Review Body for health workers in Northern Ireland.

**Darren Jones:**

The Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) is being funded above its independently assessed relative need level of 124% in 2024-25 and 2025-26, including the 2024 restoration financial package. As a result of decisions taken at the Autumn Budget and Phase 1 of the Spending Review, the Northern Ireland Executive is receiving £18.2 billion in 2025-26. This represents the largest real-terms settlement since devolution.

The NIE is responsible for deciding how to allocate their funding across their devolved responsibilities, including the provision of pay awards for health workers.

## ■ Heat Pumps

**Josh Newbury:**

[\[11072\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, of the potential merits of removing VAT from refrigerants used in heat pumps.

**James Murray:**

No assessment has been made. The installation of certain energy-saving materials, including ground- and air- source heat pumps, in residential accommodation and charity buildings benefits from a temporary zero rate of VAT until 31 March 2027 (after which it reverts to the reduced rate of 5 per cent).

There are currently no plans to extend this relief to include the sale of the components used in energy-saving materials, where they are not part of such an installation. However, the Chancellor keeps all taxes under review.

## ■ Import Controls

**Clive Jones:** [\[11511\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of introducing the third stage of the Border Target Operating Model on 31 January 2025.

**James Murray:**

The Government announced on 7th October that under the third stage of the Border Target Operating Model, Safety and Security declarations will be required for EU imports from 31 January 2025. Businesses who already complete Safety and Security import declarations do not need to make any changes to their existing systems or procedures, and businesses who will be required to complete Safety and Security declarations for the first time will only need to provide data deemed most critical to security.

## ■ Pensions: Tax Allowances

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[11122\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many people received tax relief on their pension contributions at the (a) 20% and (b) 40% rate in the latest period for which data is available.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[11123\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the total value was of pension tax relief to people paying the (a) 20% and (b) 40% rate in the latest period for which data is available.

**James Murray:**

Information on estimates of Income Tax relief on pension contributions can be found online in Table 6 of the [Private Pension Statistics](#) publication. Estimates of the total value of Income Tax and National Insurance contribution relief, broken down by the rate at which the contributions were relieved, can be found in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 of the publication respectively.

## ■ Private Education: Scotland

**Alison Taylor:** [\[10822\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) introducing transitional arrangements for and (b) delaying implementation of her policy on VAT on school fees in Scotland.

**James Murray:**

Whilst developing these policies, the Government has carefully considered the impact that they will have on pupils and their families across both the state and private sector, as well as the impact they will have on state and private schools. This consideration includes the impacts of these changes across all four nations of the UK.



The Government has additionally engaged extensively with all the devolved Governments, including the Scottish Government, on this issue.

Following scrutiny of the Government's costing by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility, the Government will confirm its approach to these reforms at the Budget on 30 October and set out its assessment of relevant expected impacts in a Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN).

## ■ Treasury: Recruitment

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[11057\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department takes to verify the qualifications of newly hired officials.

**Andrew Griffith:** [\[11058\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department takes to verify the professional experience set out in the applications of newly hired officials.

**James Murray:**

HM Treasury recruitment campaigns use Success Profiles which is the recruitment framework used within the Civil Service. HM Treasury consider what skills a candidate will need to demonstrate in order to be successful and advertise vacancies with a clear person specification. Candidates are assessed through a robust assessment process consisting of a review of application forms and finally an interview where the Success Profiles are explored and tested. A leadership assessment and / or a Staff Engagement Panel is included for Senior Civil Service vacancies in addition to the application form and interview. All recruitment into HM Treasury vacancies abides by the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles.

HM Treasury verify employment history of individuals against HM Revenue and Customs records. In cases where there is limited employment history, HM Treasury collect personal references.

Where an advertised role requires an essential qualification, this is included within the advert and candidates are asked to declare that they meet the qualification criteria when applying. If they do not meet the qualification criteria, they are unable to apply for the role.

Where a qualification is a prerequisite to an appointment, candidates present their original qualification certificates at interview stage to enable the department to verify their eligibility for the role.

## ■ Treasury: USA

**Sir Gavin Williamson:** [\[11277\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what is the estimated carbon footprint of her recent visit to Washington DC.

**James Murray:**

Due to the recent nature of the trip it is not currently possible to estimate the carbon footprint of this visit.

Further details for the trip will be published as part of the quarterly Ministers overseas travel at the following link.

[HMT ministers' meetings, hospitality, gifts and overseas travel - GOV.UK](#)

The final CO2e will be included within in the Sustainability Report section of HM Treasury 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts.

**■ Wines: Excise Duties**

**Wera Hobhouse:** [\[11025\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of the withdrawal of the temporary easement for wine on the supply chain for UK-based importers.

**Wera Hobhouse:** [\[11026\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of the withdrawal of the temporary easement for wine on SMEs in the wine industry.

**James Murray:**

In August 2023 the Government introduced reforms to alcohol duty so that products are taxed in proportion to their alcoholic strength, not volume.

To help the wine industry adapt to the new duty system, the current, temporary duty easement was introduced as a transitional measure, which was intended to allow time for wine producers to adapt to calculating duty based on alcohol by volume.

By the end-date of 31 January 2025, the wine industry will have had over two years to adapt to the new strength-based system.

The Government publishes tax information and impact notes (TIINs) for tax policy changes. The summary of impacts from the changes to alcohol duty announced at Spring Budget 2023, including the wine easement, can be found here: [Reform of Alcohol Duty Rates and Reliefs - GOV.UK](#)

**WOMEN AND EQUALITIES****■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]**

**Jodie Gosling:** [\[900968\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of recognising businesses with proactive equality practices.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

This government recognises that equality and opportunity are at the heart of our programme of national renewal, this includes in our workplaces. The best employers understand that an inclusive workplace, where employees are supported to succeed, is good for productivity and good for the business.

Under the landmark Employment Rights Bill we are taking steps to ensure that all workplaces follow the fantastic example set by some of our leading businesses. This includes requiring large employers to publish plans setting out how they are tackling the gender pay gap and supporting employees during the menopause. Through this process we expect to be able to highlight those employers exhibiting best practice, and ensure that they can share their experiences for other businesses to learn from.

**Equal Pay: Ethnic Groups****Jodie Gosling:**[\[10958\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of ensuring that companies (a) record and (b) publish ethnicity pay gap data.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The King's Speech announced our intention to publish draft legislation this session that will introduce mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting for large employers (those with 250 or more employees).

Pay gap reporting can help businesses better understand their workforce, which can lead to them adopting policies and changes which support improved productivity and improved rates of progression and retention, ensuring they make the most of the skills of their employees.

**Transphobia****Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[10874\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to tackle transphobia.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

It is crucial that trans people are safe and protected from discrimination. This government is committed to breaking down barriers by ending the politics of division.

Work is underway on the various manifesto commitments that will enhance legislative protections for all LGBT+ individuals, including those who are trans. In particular, the government is committed to delivering a trans-inclusive ban on conversion practices; ensuring that all existing strands of hate crime constitute an aggravated offence and reforming the legal gender recognition process to remove indignities for trans people while upholding the Equality Act.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### ■ Child Maintenance Service: Standards

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[11501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure (a) the accuracy of Child Maintenance Service calculations and (b) that the process of correcting mistakes in those calculations is (i) faster and (ii) easier.

**Andrew Western:**

In the year to June 2024 there were 138,000 new applications to the CMS, an increase of 10% from the year to June 2023.

To ensure calculations are accurate the department continues to build on its already proportionate and cost-effective controls, such as:

- use of verified income from HMRC and benefit systems as outlined in legislation and a principal part of service design.
- use of child benefit systems to verify qualifying child(ren).
- procedures and policy to request additional verification.
- a dedicated Financial Investigation Unit who addresses allegations of misrepresentation and fraud.
- a robust mandatory reconsideration (MR) and appeals process.
- a robust 3 Tier Quality Framework.

CMS are wholly committed to delivering the best possible service to all customers within our growing caseload.

Where a single accidental error relating to the maintenance calculation is made, a challenge can be raised by a parent or their representative within time, and corrections can be applied without the need for a review of the decision (MR).

The Department for Work and Pensions and CMS rigorously monitors accuracy as part of our service ambition to further reduce error and increase our accuracy levels. The National Audit Office set a target of monetary value errors under 1%. This standard is consistently met.

### ■ Disability Living Allowance

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[11502\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure that staff administering Disability Living Allowance claims provide claimants with a complete understanding of the benefits they are entitled to receive.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

All Disability Living Allowance (DLA) staff receive extensive training in the DLA customer journey and have an awareness of other benefits. When claiming Disability Living Allowance, a detailed notification and an additional leaflet are also issued to

the customer which explain wider benefit entitlement options and we also encourage customers to visit the Gov.uk website which provides details of additional benefits they may be entitled to.

## ■ Household Support Fund

**Mary Glendon:**

[\[10997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will take steps to improve the capacity of local authorities to administer the Household Support Fund.

**Alison McGovern:**

Since October 2021, over £2.9 billion has been allocated to Local Authorities (LAs) in England to support those most in need through the Household Support Fund (HSF).

LAs have the discretion to design their own local schemes within the parameters of the guidance and grant determination that the Department for Work and Pensions have set out for the fund. This is because they have the ties and the knowledge to best determine how support should be provided in their local communities.

We understand that improving how local government is funded is crucial to enabling councils to deliver support to their residents and ensuring we can deliver our missions. We will provide councils with more stability and certainty through multi-year funding settlements and by ending wasteful competitive bidding. This will ensure councils can plan their finances for the future properly, delivering better value for money for taxpayers.

## ■ Pension Credit

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[11033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the current threshold for pension credit.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The rates of Pension Credit are reviewed annually as part of the Secretary of State's statutory review of State pension and benefit rates. The review for 2025/26 has been completed and its conclusions announced to Parliament. Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Standard Minimum Guarantee in Pension Credit will increase from £218.15 to £227.10 a week for a single pensioner and from £332.95 to £346.60 a week for a pensioner couple. The new rates will take effect from 7 April 2025.

## ■ Pensions: Commonwealth

**Caroline Voaden:**

[\[11488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to negotiate reciprocal agreements with Commonwealth countries on uprating UK pensions.

**Emma Reynolds:**

The department has no plans to negotiate reciprocal agreements with Commonwealth countries on uprating UK pensions.

## ■ Personal Independence Payment

**Jayne Kirkham:**

[\[11503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure the accuracy of PIP assessment decisions.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

PIP assessment accuracy and quality is a priority for both suppliers and the department. The department works extensively with suppliers to make improvements to guidance, training, and audit procedures to ensure a quality service. A high standard is always maintained through an independent audit function that continually monitors performance and provides feedback to its suppliers.

DWP have a comprehensive and on-going quality assurance process in the decision-making journey and work closely with colleagues in Dispute Resolution Service (DRS), who are responsible for reconsiderations and appeals, to understand and learn from decisions that are changed. This also helps to maintain standards and consistency.

The Health Transformation Programme (HTP) is modernising Health and Disability benefit services to create a more efficient service and an improved claimant experience, building trust in our services and decisions. The HTP Evaluation Strategy, published [here](#) on GOV.UK, provides an overview of our plans to evaluate the Programme.

## ■ Unemployment

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[11392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the total number of people of working age currently out of work.

**Alison McGovern:**

Official statistics for the number of people unemployed and economically inactive are published each month by the independent Office for National Statistics (ONS), estimated using the Labour Force Survey.

The ONS headline labour market statistics define working age as between 16 and 64 years old. The latest statistics show 10.61 million people are of working age currently out of work in the UK (June-August 2024) – 1.347 million who are unemployed and 9.263 million who are economically inactive. Of the 9.263 million who are economically inactive, 2.491 million are students and 1.674 million are looking after family/home.

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<b>UNEMPLOYMENT (000's)</b>	1,347
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**Economic inactivity by reason (000's)**

Student	2,491
Looking after family / home	1,674
Temp sick	201
Long-term sick	2,750
Discouraged workers	33
Retired	1,079
Other	1,035
<b>Total (000's)</b>	<b>10,610</b>

**■ Workplace Pensions****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[11172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the criteria for auto-enrolment for workplace pensions in the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Act 2023.

**Emma Reynolds:**

Security in retirement is a key priority for this Government

We are undertaking a landmark Pensions Review, the second phase of which will consider further steps to improve pension outcomes, including assessing pension adequacy. This will consider options to build on the success of Automatic Enrolment, which has turned millions of people into pension savers.

## MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

#### ■ Political Levy

**John Glen:**

[\[11267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 30 July 2024 to Question 1206 on Political Levy, whether trade unions will be required to inform members of the right to opt-out (a) on membership forms and (b) in yearly membership renewals.

**An error has been identified in the written answer given on 31 October 2024. The correct answer should have been:**

**Justin Madders:**

**The Employment Rights Bill restores the position on political funds to before the passage of the Trade Union Act 2016. This will mean that where a trade union has a political fund, any membership form must inform members of their right to opt out of contributing to a fund. There will be no requirement on trade unions to notify members annually of their right to opt out of contributing to a political fund.**

~~The Employment Rights Bill substantively restores the position on political fund contributions to before the passage of the Trade Union Act 2016. This will mean trade union members will automatically be opted-in to contribute to a political fund, unless they expressly opt-out. We are proposing existing trade union members who did not opt-in to the political fund post 2016 would remain opted-out, and therefore we do not expect there to be any impact on these members.~~



## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

#### ■ Publication of research on public libraries usage in England

**Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant):** [\[HCWS178\]](#)

Libraries matter to people. They provide inspiration, education, entertainment and a safe haven for many thousands every week. In addition to their core function of providing books to lend or consult, they provide digital services, audio recordings, and information that can be vital to building a local business as well as bringing people together across communities.

Despite the value and benefit of public libraries for users, the library sector has faced several long-term challenges and the context for library engagement and delivery has changed significantly. Recent challenges include the impact of government driven austerity leading to cuts to local authority budgets; the COVID-19 pandemic which drastically affected people's engagement with and use of libraries; and the increasingly digital world. We cannot shy away from those challenges; the amount councils are spending on public libraries in England fell by almost half in real terms between 2009/10 and 2022/23.

DCMS has a statutory responsibility to superintend and to promote the improvement of local government's provision of public library services in England. The Culture Secretary is responsible for ensuring that library authorities deliver a "comprehensive and efficient" library service for their communities. DCMS works closely with sector stakeholders to achieve this, as well as to advocate for public libraries across government.

As part of that work, the government is publishing DCMS-commissioned research by Ipsos on barriers to library usage by the general public. The research explored the barriers to and enablers of library usage through a number of focus groups and sets out potential policy interventions that could be deployed by local or national government to promote library usage. A copy of the research will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

This research has identified a number of ways public libraries could tackle these challenges and encourage more engagement from the public including:

- raising awareness of the range of services public libraries offer, particularly digital services;
- addressing practical barriers to engagement with public services such as opening hours and parking facilities;
- clarification of the types of spaces available for all demographics and;
- harnessing the appeal of public libraries as spaces that enable and encourage community cohesion.

We are sharing the findings to ensure library services across England can actively consider how they might act on the results. DCMS is commissioning further research to test the findings and insights from phase 1 at scale to inform policy design and implementation. I will also be meeting with library sector organisations and leaders to discuss the challenges in the sector, reflect on priority policy areas and consider how best we can support the sector.

## DEFENCE

### ■ BAE Systems Barrow Incident

**Minister of State for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle):**  
[\[HCWS176\]](#)

On 30 October 2024, there was a fire in a submarine construction facility, the Devonshire Dock Hall (DDH) at the submarine build yard, run by BAE Systems, in Barrow-in-Furness.

The fire started shortly after midnight on Wednesday morning. BAE Systems implemented their emergency response plan, which moved fully to the recovery phase at 1 pm the same day. I can confirm that at no point, was there any nuclear risk from this fire.

Seven BAE Systems personnel were taken to hospital following the initial fire as a precautionary measure and all have now been released.

Once the area has been made safe a formal fire investigation will take place to establish the root cause of the fire and the extent of the damage. Until this occurs it is too soon to give a precise assessment of what, if any, impact there will be on any BAE Systems capabilities or submarine build projects. Ministers continue to engage closely with BAE Systems.

Barrow is the historic home of submarine building in the UK and this government is committed to delivering the Plan for Barrow, creating economic opportunity and delivering the nuclear deterrent as part of our National Endeavour

I would like to make a special mention of the emergency services, including those of BAE Systems and Cumbria whose professionalism and highly effective response safeguarded the local population and helped put this fire out.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Afghanistan

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Mr Hamish Falconer):** [\[HCWS179\]](#)

Today, I am updating the House on the efforts the UK Government has made to support those most in need in Afghanistan. The future of this country continues to matter to the UK due to the risk of terrorism, illegal migration, the humanitarian and food security crisis, and appalling human rights situation, particularly for women and girls.

Afghanistan remains in humanitarian crisis. According to the United Nations, over 23 million people, more than half the population, require humanitarian assistance in 2024. The FCDO has provided support to the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Afghanistan. In financial year 2023/24, we provided a total of £113.5 million in overseas development assistance to Afghanistan. All UK funding was channelled through UN Agencies, non-governmental organisations and the Red Cross Movement. Through these partnerships last year, the UK Government supported access to humanitarian assistance for more than 2.7 million people, including providing assistance to prevent malnutrition to at least 1.5 million people. The UK also helped more than 1.4 million people, of whom over one million were women, to access essential health services. We aim to ensure that more than 50% of people reached with UK assistance are women or girls.

The government has repeatedly condemned the Taliban's repressive policies and behaviour. However, like many of our allies, we maintain a limited and pragmatic dialogue with the Taliban where it is in our national interest to do so. This process was started by the previous Conservative government. This engagement does not represent legitimisation of the Taliban's actions. We will continue to hold the Taliban to account for their actions, including on the rights of women and girls, counter terrorism, human rights and maintaining humanitarian aid access.

HMG officials have engaged with the Taliban to help protect the operating space for humanitarian partners in Afghanistan, pressing on priority issues such as counter terrorism and human rights, including the rights of women and girls. We have consistently underlined the need to ensure that women continue to play an active role in the humanitarian response to the crisis in Afghanistan, and can safely access assistance and provide feedback on the quality and appropriateness of the response. We will continue to push the Taliban on this issue, and ensure women and girls remain at the heart of our aid response.

Beyond immediate humanitarian needs, the UK Government is working with the international community to support longer-term basic services for the Afghan people, including health, education and livelihoods. Through our bilateral programmes, in 2023/24, at least 83,000 children (54,000 girls) were supported to access education and at least 466,000 children (310,000 girls) were fully immunised. In February 2024, with strong UK support, the World Bank Board endorsed the provision of grant finance from the World Bank's International Development Association to Afghanistan. This funding, to which the UK Government contributes, will deliver further health, livelihoods and education programming in Afghanistan through the World Bank's Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund.

Through newly approved UK funding we will scale up livelihoods and agriculture programming to support vulnerable Afghans to grow more food, improve their income, and be more resilient to climate change, helping tackle the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in more sustainable ways. New UK investments in health and education, with a focus on women and girls, support wider goals to champion rights, equality and a healthier world.

In August, the Taliban passed a “vice and virtue” law imposing wide-ranging restrictions on Afghan women, men and children and the media, including effectively removing women from public spaces. The laws have attracted widespread international condemnation. As the Foreign Secretary has said, the exclusion of women from all aspects of public life is another tragic setback for Afghanistan and its people. Officials have directly pressed the Taliban to reverse this law and, alongside likeminded international partners, have lobbied senior Taliban officials emphasising that we consider the law a grotesque backwards step. We have also condemned the law publicly through the UN, including the Human Rights Council. We will continue to raise our serious concerns and press for the reversal of these restrictions.

We continue to engage with Afghan women and are committed to providing platforms for Afghan women to speak out, advocate for their full inclusion in society, and promote their rights. In August, the Minister for the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan hosted a group of senior Afghan women leaders to hear their perspectives and discuss the inclusion of women in Afghanistan’s future political process. In September the Minister delivered a speech to the All Afghan Women Summit in Tirana, emphasising the UK Government’s continued support to Afghanistan and solidarity with Afghan women.

In September, the Afghan embassy in London closed following the dismissal of its staff by the State of Afghanistan. This decision was not made by the UK Government. In line with international law, specifically the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Afghanistan is responsible for the appointment and termination of staff at its embassies. The FCDO recognises that the closure will create challenges for Afghan citizens in the UK who require consular services.

We continue to work constructively with parties inside and outside of Afghanistan for an Afghanistan at peace with itself, its neighbours, and the international community.

#### ■ **Report on the Government Wine Cellar 2022-24**

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Indo-Pacific (Catherine West):**  
[\[HCWS180\]](#)

I have today placed a copy of the Report on the Government Wine Cellar for the Financial Years 2022/23 and 2023/24 in the Libraries of both Houses.

This biennial Report meets our commitment to transparency on this use of the Government Wine Cellar, covering consumption, stock purchases, costs, and value for money.

### HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### ■ **Housing and Regeneration in London**

**Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):** [\[HCWS182\]](#)  
**Maximising housing delivery around Euston**

Since the construction of Britain's first inter-city rail link between London and Birmingham, Euston has been not just a bustling London neighbourhood but a gateway to the West Midlands, North West England, North Wales and Scotland.

However, like many of London's neighbourhoods, the need for housing in the area around Euston Station far outstrips supply, resulting in higher housing costs, rising levels of overcrowding and workforce pressures. To meet the challenges and grasp the opportunities facing this important part of our capital city, bold action is required.

The Government is already taking forward plans for a much-improved Euston Station, and my department is committed to supporting the delivery of significant numbers of new homes alongside this project. To progress that work, MHCLG has established the Euston Housing Delivery Group in partnership with the London Borough of Camden. This group will advise ministers and local leaders on an ambitious housing and regeneration initiative for Euston, assessing the shape and scale of the opportunity for growth in the area, and acting as a driving force for new investment in the area.

My department will work with local leaders and communities to ensure that the redevelopment of Euston is an example of exemplary placemaking. Housing delivery and commercial development will be backed by the necessary social infrastructure and amenities to create thriving new communities and bolster existing ones. Ready access to primary healthcare, spaces in primary and secondary schools, and access to open green spaces for communities will be central to our vision.

Sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. That is why it is this government's number one mission. Regenerating Euston, at the heart of our capital city, will both contribute to housing need locally, and support economic growth nationally by releasing the productive potential of this historic neighbourhood.

### **The Euston Housing Delivery Group**

As announced in the Budget, I am appointing Bek Seeley to Chair the Euston Housing Delivery Group. The group will:

- Assess the scale of opportunity for housing growth and regeneration beyond the existing Euston station site.
- Identify the infrastructure, services, and green space required to unlock maximum housing delivery.
- Consider how these housing opportunities can be delivered across Euston, working alongside with the Department for Transport, the Greater London Authority, and the London Borough of Camden.
- Advise central government and local leaders on an ambitious housing and regeneration scheme, as well as the routes to deliver it.

Bek has worked in the public and private sectors, has held a range of operational and commercial roles in economic development, infrastructure, built environment and public

services, and has overseen major housing projects in London, Birmingham and Manchester.

The Delivery Group will be made up of industry experts in urban design, architecture, affordable housing delivery and financing large-scale projects. Their core focus will be to develop a trailblazing regeneration scheme, which will unlock more investment in Euston and drive growth, benefitting the local community and the whole nation.

We will continue to update Parliament on the work of the Delivery Group.

## ■ Realising the Full Potential of Greater Cambridge

**Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook):** [\[HCWS181\]](#)

I am today updating the House on the next steps the government intends to take, in collaboration with local partners, to support ambitious and high-quality sustainable growth in Cambridge and its environs.

Sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. That is why it is this government's number one mission. The economic growth of Cambridge has been a phenomenal success and the city's strengths in knowledge-intensive businesses within its unique innovation ecosystem are well documented, with strong connections between investors, researchers, businesses and local government. We know that Greater Cambridge has the potential to make an even greater contribution to the UK economy and the government are determined to make this happen.

While local partners in Greater Cambridge share the government's ambitions, there remain significant barriers to further growth. It is essential that the government helps to remove them to overcome the issues that have held up planned development for essential housing and laboratory space. It is also vital that we take a collaborative approach to addressing the costs that have come with success, including housing affordability pressures, traffic and congestion, and air pollution. We know what can be achieved when local authorities, central government and public bodies work in partnership to overcome these challenges. I want to sustain the constructive relationship I have established with local leaders and key partners over recent months.

### **The Cambridge Growth Company**

The Deputy Prime Minister and I are determined to realise the full potential of Greater Cambridge to the benefit of its existing communities and the UK economy. I am therefore appointing Peter Freeman to Chair the Cambridge Growth Company, which will work with local partners to develop and start to deliver an ambitious plan for delivering high-quality sustainable growth in Cambridge and its environs.

Peter is a development and regeneration expert with a strong track record, working with private and public partners. He brings a wealth of experience in delivering complex mixed-use projects, including in his current role as Chair of Homes England and through the renowned redevelopment of King's Cross.

The Growth Company will focus on the following core activities:

- Enable and accelerate developments which align with the government's ambitions for Cambridge, and unlocking development on stalled sites.
- Develop the evidence base to support development of an infrastructure-first growth plan and a long-term delivery vehicle: working with experts to assess infrastructure requirements, including water and transport, and laying the foundations to establish a long-term delivery vehicle.
- Identify solutions to complex constraints and support a cross-government approach to unblock existing development, providing the right incentives for successful development in the long-term.

The work of the Cambridge Growth Company will be supported by £10 million of new funding committed at yesterday's Autumn Budget. This funding will be used to develop an ambitious plan for housing, transport and wider infrastructure, and for the water needed to support sustainable growth.

We will continue to update Parliament on the work of the Cambridge Growth Company

## TRANSPORT

### ■ CAA Annual Progress Report

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Kane):** [\[HCWS177\]](#)

The Airspace Modernisation Strategy (AMS) refresh, published on 23 January 2023, sets out, through nine elements, the ways and means of modernising airspace, focussing on the period until the end of 2040.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) must report to the Secretary of State annually on the delivery of the AMS, through an annual Progress Report. This report details the progress made by industry, as well as work the CAA have conducted against each of the AMS's elements. For 2022, the Progress Report reports on the previous AMS's 15 initiatives.

In total, six of the 15 initiatives are assessed as 'requiring attention', two are on track, one has been implemented and six initiatives have been assessed as having 'major issues'.

The Department is working with the CAA to strengthen delivery and ensure greater progress is made in implementing the airspace modernisation programme. Ministers are giving the programme urgent attention and have already announced measures to tackle these challenges, including the consultation launched on 22 October on our plans to create a new UK Airspace Design Service. This will drive forward airspace modernisation and create a system that's fit for the future by delivering quicker routes, easing delays, and reducing harmful emissions.

#### Areas of Progress

Free Route Airspace (Initiative 2) was implemented in Scotland in 2021 and remains on track for deployment in Q1 2023 across southwest England and Wales. This will see airlines being able to fly more direct routes in upper airspace reducing aviation's carbon

emissions and will save CO2 every year equivalent to the power used by some 3,500 family homes (12,000 tonnes CO2/year).

The Airspace Classification Review (Initiative 10) has made significant progress with the publication of the findings into the review of the Cotswold Region. This work has identified where airspace can be opened up for all airspace users to use (e.g., general aviation).

Under the Deployment of Electronic Surveillance Solution (Initiative 11), DfT and the CAA established the Surveillance Standards Task Force, developing national, voluntary specifications for Electronic Conspicuity. This is a key enabler in the refreshed AMS, bringing together current and new airspace users, such as drones, in order to promote a safe and integrated lower airspace.

Areas assessed as having major issues

There are a number of initiatives assessed as having 'major issues, in part because of COVID recovery and the complexities of the airspace changes in the London cluster. However, formal acceptance of ACOG's Masterplan Iteration 2 in January 2022 was a critical milestone. This was enabled in part to £9.2m funding by Government. Iteration 3 will be published later this year following a number of public engagement exercises.

Of the six initiatives requiring attention, timescales and delivery plans have been reassessed and re-baselined as a result of publication of the refreshed AMS.

I will place a copy of the Airspace Modernisation 2023 Progress Report in the libraries of both Houses.

## ■ DVLA and VCA Business Plans for 2024-25

**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood):**  
[\[HCWS183\]](#)

I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2024-25 business plans for two of the Department for Transport's Motoring Agencies: the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA).

Each agency's business plans sets out:

- 1) the key business priorities that each agency will deliver and any significant changes they plan to make to their services, and
- 2) the key performance indicators, by which their performance will be assessed.

These plans allow service users and members of the public to understand the agencies' plans for delivering their key services and managing their finances.

The business plans will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both Houses.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) 2024-25 business plan will be published separately as we continue to work with them on measures to drive down practical driving test waiting times.