



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 1 November 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:46 P.M., 01 November 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

CABINET OFFICE

■ Intelligence Services: Workplace Pensions

John Glen: [\[10989\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether individuals of pension age receiving a pension from the security and intelligence services are able to accrue a civil service pension if employed by the civil service.

Georgia Gould:

The security and intelligence services' pension scheme is separate from the Civil Service Pension Scheme. It is possible for an individual, in receipt of benefits from the pension scheme for the security and intelligence services, to accrue a Civil Service pension if employed in the Civil Service, and then receive a pension from both schemes when they retire.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Leisure Centres: Repairs and Maintenance

Mike Amesbury: [\[10760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what capital funding is available to local authorities to help (a) develop and (b) refurbish leisure centres.

Stephanie Peacock:

The ongoing responsibility of providing access to public sport and leisure facilities lies at Local Authority level. Local Authorities work in partnership with operators who manage leisure services.

Decisions on future funding available for Local Authorities will be set out as part of departmental spending plans in the coming weeks.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces: Equality

Rupert Lowe: [\[11193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether each of the armed forces has diversity targets.

Al Carns:

The Armed Forces do not have diversity targets. There are agreed Levels of Ambition for recruitment and representation of females and ethnic minority personnel.

In a competitive age, our advantage derives from the talent and skills of our people. We must attract, recruit, and retain the best people drawn from the broadest diversity of thought, skills and background – it is mission critical to our operational effectiveness and to ensuring we continue to meet the threats we face and safeguard the security, stability and prosperity of our nation.

■ Estonia: Unmanned Air Vehicles

James Cartlidge: [\[11014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the results of training flights using Watchkeeper WK450 tactical unmanned aerial vehicle systems in Estonia in August 2024.

James Cartlidge: [\[11016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to permanently deploy a drone-specialist regiment in Estonia.

James Cartlidge: [\[11017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to undertake further drone flight tests in Estonia following the 47th Regiment Royal Artillery's testing during August.

Luke Pollard:

A battery from 47th Regiment Royal Artillery successfully deployed to Estonia this August to operate the Watchkeeper system as part of Exercise ATHENA SHIELD. This was a proof-of-concept exercise to fly Watchkeeper at the latest build standard, in a strategically relevant theatre.

Lessons from this deployment are still being analysed and no decisions about Watchkeeper's future commitments have been made. While there are no current plans to permanently deploy a full Drone Regiment to Estonia, the recently updated defence roadmap with Estonia demonstrates the UK's continuing commitment to Estonia and securing NATO's eastern flank.

■ Watchkeeper Wk450

James Cartlidge: [\[11015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Army's Watchkeeper mid-life extension programme.

Luke Pollard:

Work to assess the options available to the Department regarding the Watchkeeper Mid-Life Extension programme is ongoing, as such no final assessment has been made.

EDUCATION**■ Apprentices****Anna Dixon:**[\[10825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will conduct a review into apprenticeships that includes taking representations from existing functional skills teachers.

Janet Daby:

The department keeps all aspects of apprenticeships policy under review, including the English and mathematics requirements, to make sure it is striking the right balance in equipping apprentices with the right skills, without putting up unnecessary barriers to starting or completing an apprenticeship.

More widely, the government will be transforming the apprenticeships levy into a new growth and skills levy, which will offer greater flexibility to employers and learners and align with the government's Industrial Strategy. Skills England will be working closely with employers, training providers, unions and other key partners to identify priority skills gaps, helping to ensure that levy-funded training delivers value for money, meets the needs of business and helps kick start economic growth. Details on Skills England engagement plans will be set out in due course.

■ Degrees and Higher National Diplomas**Josh Newbury:**[\[11080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase the provision of level (a) five and (b) six qualifications in areas that do not have a university.

Janet Daby:

The department continues to support access to higher level qualifications to break down barriers to opportunity and support economic growth.

The department continues to support learners who wish to progress from Level 3 to a higher level, whether that is to study at university, a higher level or degree apprenticeship, or a Level 4 or 5 classroom-based qualification, including Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), which have been approved as providing the skills that employers need.

The introduction of HTQs at Level 5 is aimed at providing high quality, employer-led qualifications that meet the needs of local economies and improves the accessibility and flexibility of higher education. These qualifications are designed to be delivered by further education colleges and other providers and are flexible, offering full-time, part-time and online learning options. This allows breadth of access, meaning that individuals who do not live near a university may be able to access higher technical education through a college.

The department also continues to support the delivery of higher and degree apprenticeships, which allow individuals to earn while they learn and gain qualifications up to Level 6. This approach helps to ensure that training is closely aligned with industry needs.

Additionally, institutions like the Open University offer Validation Programmes enabling institutions without their own degree-awarding powers to offer validated higher education programmes. Such initiatives can help to ensure that high quality degrees are accessible to learners in areas that do not have a university.

The department is also setting up Skills England, a new body, to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to meet the skills needs of the next decade across all regions, providing strategic oversight of the post-16 skills system aligned to the government's Industrial Strategy.

The government will bring forward a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce, and drive economic growth through our Industrial Strategy.

■ Education: Exports and Overseas Students

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[11091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans her Department has to update the International Education Strategy.

Janet Daby:

The government will be conducting a review of the International Education Strategy, which will ensure that it continues to reflect the priorities of education stakeholders, businesses and this government. As part of the review, the department will undertake data collection and analysis, alongside engagement to gather feedback from sector stakeholders. The department aims to conclude the review in spring 2025, at which point an updated International Education Strategy will be published.

■ Higher Education

David Williams:

[\[10908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help support people to transition from level three qualifications to higher levels.

Janet Daby:

Skills are crucial to economic growth, with a third of productivity improvement over the last two decades explained by improvements to skills levels. However, between 2017 and 2022, skills shortages in England doubled to more than half a million and now account for 36% of job vacancies.

To address this, Skills England will bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions across all regions to meet the skills needs of the next decade to provide strategic oversight of the post-16 skills system that is aligned to the government's Industrial Strategy.

The government will also bring forward a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce and drive economic growth through its Industrial Strategy.

The department will continue to support learners who wish to progress from Level 3 to a higher level, whether that is to study at university, a higher level or degree apprenticeship, or a Level 4 or 5 classroom-based qualification such as a Higher Technical Qualification, which have been approved as providing the skills that employers need.

■ Local Skills Improvement Plans

David Williams: [\[10912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to (a) support Local Skills Improvement Plans and (b) prevent duplication of those plans with Skills England.

Janet Daby:

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) support the department's aim to make technical education and training more responsive to local labour market and employer needs.

Since autumn 2022, the designated employer representative bodies (ERBs) leading the LSIPs have engaged thousands of local businesses regarding their skills needs. The resultant LSIPs are a valuable source of information for local skills deliverers, employers and stakeholders, and will provide important intelligence for the newly-established Skills England.

Skills England will work closely with regional stakeholders, including the designated ERBs that cover all of England across the 38 LSIP areas.

■ National School Breakfast Programme

Damian Hinds: [\[10687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure that access to free school breakfasts for (a) secondary school pupils, (b) special schools and (c) alternative provision continues after the expiration of the National School Breakfast Programme in July 2025.

Stephen Morgan:

The government is committed to delivering on its pledge of breakfast clubs in every state funded school with primary aged pupils. We have made early progress toward this, including announcing that up to 750 early adopters will be delivering these new breakfast clubs from April 2025.

We remain committed to delivering the National School Breakfast Club Programme alongside the early adopters.

Officials are working closely with schools and sector experts to develop a new breakfast clubs programme that meets the needs of pupils, schools and parents. This

includes consideration of how best to transition schools from existing to new arrangements. Further details will follow in due course.

■ **Schools: Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month**

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[10969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what data her Department holds on the proportion of schools that celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month; and what steps she is taking to help support the inclusion of this history on the National Curriculum.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department does not hold data on the proportion of schools that celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month.

Schools are free to decide which events to commemorate and what activities to put in place to support pupils' understanding of significant events and particular months or days dedicated to specific communities, such as the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller history month in June.

Schools are already able to teach about Gypsy, Roma and Travellers' history as part of offering a broad and rich curriculum, for example, through subjects such as history and citizenship. Resources are available from experts in the communities themselves and bodies such as the Historical Association.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Hertfordshire**

Sir Oliver Dowden:

[\[11008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve the provision of SEND services in Hertfordshire.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government is committed to providing the necessary support to improve the experiences for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families. We are committed to taking a community-wide approach, improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools and alternative provision settings, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs.

Ofsted inspected local arrangements for children with SEND in Hertfordshire in July 2023. Its report, published on 10 November 2023, concluded that there are widespread and/or systemic failings, leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.

The department provides support and challenge to the Hertfordshire local area partnership by monitoring progress against its priority action plan and improvement plan, and by providing advice and guidance via a SEND expert advisor. The partnership has also established a SEND Improvement Board, independently chaired by Dame Christine Lenehan to oversee progress and provide appropriate challenge.

Sir Oliver Dowden:

[\[11009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle funding gaps for statutory SEND duties in Hertfordshire.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department is providing schools with extra funding of almost £1.1 billion in the 2024/25 financial year, to support schools with overall costs, including the costs of supporting their pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Following the Budget, schools funding will be increased by a further £2.3 billion in 2025/26. Of this overall increase, nearly £1 billion is for children and young people with complex needs and will bring high needs funding to a total of £11.9 billion next year. As overall funding for the 2025/26 financial year has been announced later than normal, allocations calculated through the high needs and schools national funding formulae have not been published to the usual timescales. We will publish further information as soon as possible.

Sir Oliver Dowden:

[\[11010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle disparities in per-head High Needs Funding between Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Catherine McKinnell:

Allocations of high needs funding for the 2025/26 financial year will be published as soon as possible now that overall budgets for next year have been announced. The department will take longer to consider changes to the funding formula that is used to allocate funding and which creates the variations in funding levels between local authorities across the country. The department fully recognises the importance of establishing a fair education funding system, that directs funding to where it is needed.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Training**

James MacCleary:

[\[11125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will ensure that all teachers are trained to support students with Special Educational Needs.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer the hon. Member for Lewes to the answer of 29 October 2024 to Question [10604](#).

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO**■ Boiler Upgrade Scheme: Heat Pumps****Josh Newbury:**[\[11073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) value for money of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme for increasing the number of heat pump installations.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Up to the end of August 2024, the Boiler Upgrade Scheme has paid out 32,572 vouchers towards low carbon heating systems.

The Government is carrying out an independent evaluation of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, with its first set of interim findings due to be published in due course.

■ Carbon Emissions**Wera Hobhouse:**[\[11027\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of recognising book and claim as a form of corporate emissions reporting.

Kerry McCarthy:

Large or listed UK companies are required to disclose specified emissions under the regulations which underpin Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting. Currently, Government is considering the International Sustainability Standards Board reporting requirements which do not prohibit the use of book and claim for emissions, subject to transparent reporting and verification. DESNZ is also reviewing the Environmental Reporting Guidance which includes guidance on reporting renewable energy where Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin are used alongside physical purchase of energy, as well as use of carbon offsets. However, there are no plans to conduct a specific assessment of the merits of book and claim at the present time.

■ Coal: Mining**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[10971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether the Coal Authority plans to award new licences for the (a) mining and (b) extraction of coal.

Michael Shanks:

Our manifesto was clear on our intention to not grant new coal licences, and we are exploring avenues to achieve this. We want to end coal licensing to support our net zero ambitions and our priority to lead on international climate action, based on our domestic achievements.

■ Energy Company Obligation: Fraud**Josh Newbury:** [\[11081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to tackle fraud in the Energy Company Obligation scheme.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Department works with the scheme administrator, Ofgem, to investigate and address any suspected misconduct under the ECO scheme. Dedicated work is ongoing on external assurance to review processes and procedures, and strengthening of fraud controls in future scheme design. Ofgem has dedicated teams working on counter fraud and whistleblowing. Ofgem leads on detection, prevention, deterrence, and takes action where there is evidence of fraud. If evidence of potential fraud is found, Ofgem engages with relevant authorities, such as Action Fraud. Additionally, TrustMark works with the department and Ofgem to engage with scheme providers to address and mitigate such activities.

■ Energy: Housing**Mr Luke Charters:** [\[10966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Future Home Standard on National Grid capacity.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government is committed to expanding the electricity network to support the Clean Energy Superpower mission and is working closely with Ofgem and industry to mobilise the required investment at the scale and pace required.

Price controls set by Ofgem ensure network companies are investing in infrastructure build, as well as smart management of network assets, to ensure the network has sufficient capacity. This includes accommodating increasing numbers of households adopting electric heating, solar generation and EV charging, both through future standards for new build properties and retrofit of the existing housing stock.

Josh Newbury: [\[11071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to introduce (a) low- and (b) no-cost finance for domestic energy efficiency measures in its Warm Homes Plan.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government recognises the important role private finance can play in helping us achieve our decarbonisation ambitions.

As part of the Warm Homes Plan, officials are exploring the role of incentives and private finance to support homeowners with the upfront costs of energy efficiency improvements and low carbon heating. These are upgrades that will transform homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to run.

Officials are also exploring options for working with the private sector, including banks and building societies. We will set out further detail on delivering our Warm Homes Plan in due course.

■ Heating: Carbon Emissions

Josh Newbury:

[\[11069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of using the gas grid to support the decarbonisation of (a) domestic and (b) industrial space heating.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government is committed to transforming Britain into a clean energy superpower, including providing the country with clean power by 2030, reducing bills, and transitioning homes to low carbon heating through the Warm Homes Plan.

Gas will continue to play an important role in our energy system for decades to come, and a reliable gas network is essential to support the transition. We are also working with industry to support low-carbon gases such as hydrogen and bio methane.

■ Housing: Energy

Josh Newbury:

[\[11074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of creating a single service to advise households on (a) energy efficiency in the home and (b) financial support available for energy efficiency improvements.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Improving energy efficiency and decarbonising buildings is a crucial element in our mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower. This will also lower energy bills and support the reduction of Fuel Poverty.

This is why the Government is going further to simplify the user journey for consumers, on GOV.UK, creating a single access point for all consumers (homeowners, landlords and tenants) at varying points in their retrofit journey. It will bring into one space information, sources of funding and links to trusted installers, and simplify and expand the current government advice and information offer. More details will be announced in the Warm Homes Plan.

■ Natural Gas

Josh Newbury:

[\[11070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential cost to the public purse of decommissioning the gas grid.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is committed to transforming Britain into a clean energy superpower, including providing the country with clean power by 2030, reducing bills, and transitioning homes to low carbon heating through the Warm Homes Plan.

Gas will continue to play an important role in our energy system for decades to come, and a reliable gas network is essential to support the transition. We are also working with industry to support low-carbon gases such as hydrogen and bio methane.

■ Natural Gas and Oil: Licensing**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[10970\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether the North Sea Transition Authority plans to award new licences for the (a) production and (b) extraction of oil and gas.

Michael Shanks:

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

The North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) has independently paused issuing any invitations to apply for new licences (including out-of-rounds invitations) pending the finalisation of the process related to delivery of the manifesto commitment and the plans for new environmental guidance for oil and gas firms.

■ Natural Gas: Carbon Emissions**Josh Newbury:**[\[11068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to help decarbonise the gas grid.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is committed to transforming Britain into a clean energy superpower, including providing the country with clean power by 2030, reducing bills, and transitioning homes to low carbon heating through the Warm Homes Plan.

Gas will continue to play an important role in our energy system for decades to come, and a reliable gas network is essential to support the transition. We are also working with industry to support low-carbon gases such as hydrogen and bio methane.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Lighting: Pollution****Alex Mayer:**[\[11370\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the Secretary of State for Communities, Housing and Local Government on the potential impact of light pollution on animal populations; and what steps he is taking to reduce light pollution in (a) urban, (b) suburban and (c) rural areas.

Mary Creagh:

Defra has not had direct discussions with the Secretary of State for Communities, Housing and Local Government about the potential impact of light pollution on animal populations. Defra will continue to work closely with researchers, non-governmental organisations and across the Government to improve our understanding of the impacts of light pollution and will continue to address key threats to biodiversity. For example, our Pollinator Action Plan includes an action to keep potential and emerging threats such as light pollution under review.

Government policy is to encourage good design, planning policies and decisions to limit the impact of pollution from artificial light. In particular, lighting schemes for developments in protected areas of dark sky or intrinsically dark landscapes should be carefully assessed on their necessity and degree.

The Government believes that any mitigating actions to reduce light pollution in urban, suburban and rural areas are best taken by local authorities as these are best dealt with at a local level.

Water Companies: Climate Change**Clive Lewis:**[\[11281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 25 October 2024 to Question 9485 on Water Companies: Climate Change, what steps his Department is taking to monitor the adequacy of how Ofwat is carrying out this statutory duty.

Emma Hardy:

As an independent regulator, Ofwat carries out its statutory duties autonomously from the Government and instead is directly accountable to Parliament. The department therefore does not routinely monitor or assess how Ofwat carries out its duties.

An Independent Commission into the water sector regulatory system was launched by the UK and Welsh Governments on Wednesday 23 October. Through this review, we will look at long-term, wider reform of the water sector as a whole. This includes considering and clarifying the roles of regulators, as well as how to ensure water company infrastructure is secure and resilient to short- and long-term pressures.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**Development Aid****Gregory Stafford:**[\[10915\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make it his policy not to provide Official Development Assistance to countries that have a higher (a) gross domestic product and (b) purchasing parity power than the UK.

Anneliese Dodds:

In line with international rules, the UK provides Official Development Assistance (ODA) only to countries with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita below \$13,846. All recipients of our ODA have a lower GNI per capita than the UK, including when adjusted for purchasing power parity.

Development Aid: HIV Infection**Jim Shannon:**[\[10998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department takes to help ensure continuity of support for delivery of community-led HIV response during (a) conflict and (b) climate disasters.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is a significant funder of the HIV response, and through our support of organisations such as UNAIDS, the Global Fund, and Robert Carr Fund (RCF), provides funding to grassroots and community-led organisations to support those at greater risk or living with HIV and who are particularly vulnerable during conflict and climate disaster.

For example, for UNAIDS its co-sponsoring organisations, especially WHO and UNHCR, play an important role in supporting community-led organisations within emergency and conflict environments where access to HIV treatment is limited. The Global Fund has also approved over US\$130 million through its Emergency Fund in the last 10 years which has enabled quick and flexible financing to countries in emergency situations, ensuring the continuity of HIV programmes and services.

Food Supply**Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[11384\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve global food security.

Anneliese Dodds:

Improving global food and nutrition security is a priority for this government. Our diplomatic and humanitarian engagement is addressing acute need and famine risks in places like Sudan and Gaza. We support long-term solutions, working with partners to transform food and farming systems, critical for inclusive growth, climate resilience and nature protection. At the G20 Development Ministers Meeting in Brazil in July, I announced the UK would join the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty when it launches in November, to increase political support, unlock finance, share and learn, and work with partners to scale-up lasting solutions.

■ Malaria: Disease Control

Jim Shannon:

[\[10730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) the Global Fund and (b) other multilateral organisations to eliminate TB.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is a leading donor in the fight against tuberculosis (TB). Our £1 billion commitment to the Global Fund (2023 to 2025) will provide TB treatment and care for 1.1 million people, screen 20 million people for TB and provide 41,800 people with treatment for multidrug-resistant TB. This is complemented by our investment in Unitaid to improve access to key TB products and support to WHO and others to strengthen health systems.

■ Nigeria: Religious Freedom

Preet Kaur Gill:

[\[11028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to help promote freedom of religious belief for (a) Christians and (b) other religious minorities in Nigeria.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK continues to champion Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all in Nigeria, and beyond. No one should live in fear because of what they do, or do not believe in. We work to uphold the right to FoRB through our position at the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora and bilaterally in Nigeria. The UK Government remains committed to supporting Nigeria to address ongoing security challenges, including violent extremism and intercommunal violence, which continue to impinge on the rights of Nigerians to FoRB. In June, we delivered a speech at the UNSC to promote FoRB and highlight our work to tackle intercommunal violence in Nigeria. At the latest UK-Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership dialogue in February 2024, we reaffirmed our commitment to working with Nigeria to respond to the shared threat of terrorism.

■ Slavery: Compensation

Rupert Lowe:

[\[11102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the Government's policy is on paying reparations to countries impacted by the UK's historic involvement in slavery.

Anneliese Dodds:

The government's position on this has not changed - we do not pay reparations. We are committed to working with affected countries on the most pressing challenges of today (including security, growth, education, health, climate), and to build partnerships on those areas in the future. We fully recognise the horrific impacts and

the understandable, ongoing strength of feeling on the issue across communities in the UK and across the Commonwealth family.

■ Sudan: Human Rights

Phil Brickell:

[\[11090\]](#)

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 report entitled Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan published by the UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan on 6 September 2024.

Anneliese Dodds:

Following publication of its first report in September, the UK co-led the renewal on 9 October 2024 of the Fact-Finding Mission's mandate for a further year. The UK will continue to use its position as penholder at the Security Council and the Human Rights Council to keep a spotlight on the human rights situation in Sudan. During the 120-day UN Security Council session on Sudan on 28 October, the UK called on the warring parties to urgently facilitate humanitarian access, and we have also called on Member States to refrain from external interference, including our explanation of vote following the adoption of resolution 2750 on 11 September to renew the UN Darfur arms embargo and sanctions regime. The UK welcomes the Secretary-General's recommendations on protection of civilians, which was requested in UK-led resolution 2736 as an important step for prioritising protection of civilians in the conflict. It concluded that conditions for the successful deployment of a Protection of Civilians force, as recommended in the FFM's report, do not currently exist.

■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[11386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to provide humanitarian assistance in Sudan.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Sudan conflict has created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world with 24.8 million people in need of assistance. The UK continues to provide humanitarian assistance to support people in Sudan and those who've fled the country. The UK's ODA this year in response to the conflict in Sudan is £113.5 million - the vast majority of which is spent on vital humanitarian aid and support for the regional refugee crisis. This funding includes support to key UN agencies such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF who are providing life-saving food assistance in Sudan. We are also one of the largest donors to the UN-led Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF) which provides support to local and national responders, Emergency Response Rooms and a consortium of international non-governmental organisations. The UK continues to support the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), including their work on emergency preparedness and response, protection of civilians, and providing life-saving healthcare across Sudan.

■ Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Jim Shannon:

[\[10732\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to promote the World Health Organisation's BPaLM/BPaL regimen to treat multidrug resistant TB.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK's funding to the TB Alliance (around £70 million over 6 years) contributed to the development of the BPaLM/BPaL regimen. Our £1 billion contribution to the Global Fund is supporting countries to use BPaLM/BPaL for the treatment of multi-drug resistant TB and our funding to the Clinton Health Access Initiative has provided technical support to help countries introduce the regimen at optimal prices. In addition, our support to MedAccess helped secure a 34 per cent reduction in the price of one of the critical drugs - pretomanid - used in the regimen.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Blood Cancer

Mr Lee Dillon:

[\[11129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to provide adequate funding for research into blood cancer (a) treatment and (b) care; and what steps he is taking to help tackle delays in blood cancer diagnosis.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department funds research into blood cancer through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). NIHR research expenditure for all cancers was £121.8 million in 2022/23. The NIHR spends more on cancer than any other disease group.

In blood cancer research, the NIHR is funding the £2.6 million PROPEL trial, testing whether a package of enhanced personalised prehabilitation can help people with acute myeloid leukaemia cope better with treatment. The NIHR is also funding a £3 million trial of the drug ibrutinib for treatment of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, and a £2.2 million study to evaluate the digital health platform, AscelusTM, for management of blood disorders, including cancers.

The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including all cancers. As with other Government funders of health research, the NIHR does not allocate funding for specific disease areas. Applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money, and scientific quality.

We are committed to improving cancer survival rates and hitting all National Health Service cancer waiting time standards within five years, so no patient waits longer

than they should. We will also address the challenges in diagnostic waiting times, providing the number of computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, and other tests that are needed to reduce waits.

We are committed to achieving the Faster Diagnosis Standard, which aims to ensure patients have cancer diagnosed or ruled out within 28 days of referral from a general practice (GP) or screening services. We are expanding direct access to diagnostic scans across all GPs, helping to cut waiting times and speeding up a cancer diagnosis or all-clear for patients.

The NHS is implementing non-specific symptom pathways for patients who present with vague and non-specific symptoms, which do not clearly align to a cancer type. This aims to reduce the delays experienced by some patients, and are expected to be of particular benefit to people presenting with signs and symptoms that could be due to blood cancer.

Mr Lee Dillon:

[\[11130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of taking steps to increase the number of clinical academics dedicated to blood cancer research.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), is the largest funder of clinical academic training in the United Kingdom, delivering a comprehensive research career pathway for the full range of clinicians. The NIHR welcomes applications for training awards from the clinical and non-clinical academic workforce conducting research into any aspect of human health, including blood cancer. The NIHR continuously reviews the training offer to identify and address gaps across specialism, geography, and profession, in line with the Department's priorities.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Public Appointments

Esther McVey:

[\[9445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his policy is on allowing people with financial interests in the private healthcare sector to be (a) employed in and (b) non executive directors at his Department.

Karin Smyth:

All Department employees are subject to the Department's policy on the Declaration and Management of Outside Interests. The policy is in alignment with the model Cabinet Office guidance in this area for Civil Servants, published on the GOV.UK website, which sets out how staff can identify when a perceived, potential, or actual conflict of interest arises, and what action must be taken in those circumstances. This includes a discussion between the employee and manager to determine whether there is a conflict of interest in the first instance, or perceived conflict of interest, such that the employee should be excluded from the activity, or that the employee may continue with the activity but must implement actions to mitigate any risk. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/declaration-and-management-of-outside-interests-in-the-civil-service/declaration-and-management-of-outside-interests-in-the-civil-service>

Prior to appointment and throughout their term of office, non-executive board members are required to declare all relevant interests, and for any areas where a potential conflict of interest could be seen to arise, mitigations are required to be put in place and approved by the Department. Declarations of interest are published each year in the Register of Interests in the Department's Annual Report and Accounts.

■ Gender Dysphoria: Clinics

Abtisam Mohamed:

[10871]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce waiting times at Sheffield Gender Identity Clinic.

Karin Smyth:

The Gender Identity Clinic in Sheffield is one of seven nationally commissioned adult Gender Dysphoria clinics in England. To reduce wait times, NHS England has expanded the number of clinical and administrative posts available within the Sheffield Clinic, in addition to improving the training and support offered to primary care to support hormone prescribing. Those who are on the waiting list are also supported by dedicated Peer Support Workers.

NHS England is committed to reducing wait times across all gender services. Since July 2020, NHS England has increased clinical capacity with the rollout of five new adult gender pilot clinics. The rollout of these new clinics is helping to tackle long waiting times, which had increased due to a shortage of specialist clinical staff to meet the rapidly rising demand.

NHS England is currently undertaking a review of adult gender services, chaired by Dr David Levy. The review will examine the model of care and operating procedures of each service, and will carefully consider experiences, feedback, and outcomes from clinicians and patients, with the aim of producing an updated service specification

■ Health Services: Women

Sonia Kumar:

[11135]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment the Department has made of the potential impact of women's health hubs on health disparities in the treatment of (a) endometriosis, (b) polycystic ovary syndrome, (c) other menstrual health conditions and (d) other women's healthcare.

Karin Smyth:

Women's health hubs bring together healthcare professionals and existing services to provide integrated women's health services in the community, centred on meeting women's needs across their life course. Hubs have potential to have a positive

impact on reducing inequalities in treatment of menstrual health conditions including polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis.

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Birmingham, RAND, and the Cambridge Rapid Evaluation Centre conducted a scoping evaluation of women's health hubs established between 2001 and 2022. The report was published in September 2024, and it identified reducing inequalities and improving quality of care as key aims of women's health hub pilots. The report found that hub leaders were committed to reducing inequalities and many were implementing strategies to do so, but noted that evidence on hub benefits was still evolving.

The report highlights that the impact on inequalities could be determined through a set of measures, one of these being diagnosis for conditions such as endometriosis. The report is available at the following link:

<https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr/JYFT5036/#/abstract>

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, with one of the aims being to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. Care for menstrual problems, including PCOS and endometriosis, is included as a core service for these pilot hubs.

■ Maternity Services: Staff

Lee Anderson:

[11049]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to increase the number of NHS staff working on maternity units.

Karin Smyth:

We are committed to growing workforce capacity as quickly as possible to meet local needs and achieve safe staffing levels. Bringing in the staff we need will take time, but this is an absolute priority for the Government. We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the National Health Service and make it fit for the future.

One of the themes in NHS England's Three-Year Delivery Plan covers growing, retaining, and supporting our workforce. NHS England is boosting the midwifery workforce through undergraduate training, apprenticeships, postgraduate conversion, return to midwifery programmes, and international recruitment.

We also remain committed to the Long-Term Workforce Plan, which sets out the steps the NHS and its partners need to take to deliver an NHS workforce that meets the changing needs of the population over the next 15 years. It will put the workforce on a sustainable footing for the long term.

■ Mental Health Services: Staff

Josh Newbury:

[\[10853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much and what proportion of funding available through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme has been spent on mental health practitioners since 2019.

Stephen Kinnock:

Funding available through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) for mental health practitioners accounts for 50% of the costs of these roles, with the other 50% provided by mental health trusts. Mental health practitioners were not introduced into the ARRS until 2021/22. The following table shows the spend on mental health practitioners through the ARRS, and that spend as a proportion of overall ARRS funding, for 2021/22 to 2023/24:

YEAR	MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONER SPEND THROUGH THE ARRS	PROPORTION OF OVERALL ARRS FUNDING
2021/22	£3,402,000	0.5%
2022/23	£18,281,000	1.8%
2023/24	£31,000,000	2.2%

■ Periods: Health Education

Chris Bloore:

[\[10305\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to update the NHS website to include up-to-date information on menstrual health conditions using (a) plain and (b) accessible English.

Karin Smyth:

The Department worked with NHS England to introduce a new women's health area on the National Health Service's website in 2023. This brings together over 100 health topics including periods, gynaecological conditions, fertility, pregnancy, heart health, and cancers, and is designed to be a first port of call for women seeking health information. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/womens-health/>

As part of this work, a number of pages were updated, including pages on heavy periods and endometriosis, and a new page on adenomyosis was created. One of the key goals of the NHS website is to provide users with clear and accurate health information. There are no current plans to further update the NHS website on menstrual conditions, subject to the standard review of all editorial content at least every three years.

The NHS has also used its YouTube channel to provide up-to-date information on endometriosis and heavy menstrual bleeding, with further information on both topics available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABi1ncHorBY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Pgm30RYVIs&list=PLnhASgDToTkVlLigKt1XBE-iwZVJxd7Lto>

■ Social Services: Private Sector

Sir Ashley Fox:

[7620]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to take steps to ensure that private care providers are Regularly (a) inspected and (b) rated by the Care Quality Commission.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 14 October 2024]: The Department has taken steps to ensure that all providers registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), including private care providers are regularly assessed and rated by the CQC.

The interim findings and recommendations made by Dr Penny Dash as part of her review include a clear need for the CQC to increase operational activity. Work is underway to increase the number of inspections the CQC carries out, this includes inspections of private care providers, so the public have an up-to-date understanding of quality and providers are able to demonstrate improvement.

The CQC is working with Professor Sir Mike Richards and Professor Vic Rayner, the Chair of the Care Provider Alliance, to review longer-term improvements to their single assessment framework and how they use it. Other changes to the single assessment framework, such as how CQC score quality statements will allow the CQC to assess and inspect more services while ensuring their ratings are robust. This will also allow the CQC to produce better reports that are clearer about their judgements and ratings.

The CQC reports to the Department regularly on their improvement work, and wider responses to the interim Dash review.

HOME OFFICE

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Stoke-on-Trent North

David Williams:

[10914]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour in (a) Stoke-on-Trent North constituency and (b) Kidsgrove.

Dame Diana Johnson:

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

We will put thousands of new neighbourhood police and community support officers into local communities, such as Stoke-on-Trent, and crack down on those causing havoc on our high streets by introducing tougher powers including new Respect Orders to tackle repeat offending.

Asylum**Tim Farron:**[\[10977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to expand safe routes for asylum seekers.

Seema Malhotra:

The UK continues to welcome refugees and people in need through our existing global resettlement schemes which include the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Community Sponsorship and the Mandate Resettlement Scheme. Safe and legal routes will continue to play a vital role in our overall migration system. However, given the scale of today's global displacement challenges, it is not possible to offer a pathway into the UK to every person who needs or wants one. Those who need international protection should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach – that is the fastest route to safety.

British Nationality: Assessments**Oliver Ryan:**[\[10959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) updating the Life in the UK (i) handbook and (ii) citizenship test and (b) introducing integration classes to help people adjust to life in the UK.

Seema Malhotra:

The Life in the UK test is important for anyone applying to settle permanently in the UK to ensure they have an understanding of the democratic principles underlying British society and aspects of our culture and traditions. The handbook and questions are periodically reviewed to ensure the information is up to date and correct.

Individuals granted asylum have access to work and to mainstream services that support their integration, and receive a Welcome Guide to provide information to support their cultural orientation and integration into life in the UK.

Crime: Rural Areas**Stuart Anderson:**[\[10770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help Police and Crime Commissioners tackle (a) rural crime and (b) agricultural theft.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is committed to reducing crime and disorder in rural areas, given the devastating impact rural crime can have on communities. Under our reforms, rural communities will be safeguarded, with tougher measures to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, strengthened neighbourhood policing and stronger measures to prevent farm theft and fly-tipping.

We are also committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023, which aims to prevent the theft and re-sale of high-value equipment, particularly for use in an agricultural setting.

■ Migrant Workers: Domestic Service**Freddie van Mierlo:**[\[11141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the report entitled 12 Years of Modern Slavery, published by Kalayaan on 16 June 2024, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of reinstating the pre-2012 visa regime for migrant domestic workers.

Seema Malhotra:

We keep all policies and immigration routes under review. There are a number of protections in place for overseas domestic workers (ODWs) designed to minimise the risk of exploitation.

ODWs are able to change their employer without notifying the Home Office, to ensure those who need to escape unsuitable conditions can do so quickly and without additional administration. Employers of ODWs must act in accordance with UK employment law, including the National Minimum Wage.

Workers who find themselves a victim of modern slavery are protected by the National Referral Mechanism and may be eligible to apply for permission to stay as a Domestic Worker who is a Victim of Modern Slavery.

■ Ministers: Private Property**John Glen:**[\[10992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether theft of a Minister's personal possessions while on official business is covered by Departmental insurance.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Government departments do not generally purchase commercial insurance cover except in the most exceptional circumstances.

Instead, each government department, in accordance with Treasury guidance, carries its own risk and meets any valid liabilities arising.

In the event of loss or theft of personal effects whilst travelling on official duty, claims will be considered on a case-by-case basis having regard to normal terms and conditions of service.

■ Overseas Students

Abtisam Mohamed:

[10876]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will remove international students from net migration targets.

Seema Malhotra:

Net migration statistics are produced by the independent Office for National Statistics (ONS).

■ Police Community Support Officers and Special Constables

Josh Newbury:

[10844]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has issued guidance to (a) police forces and (b) Police and Crime Commissioners on the powers granted to (i) Police Community Support Officers and (ii) special constables.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Under Section 38 of the Police Reform Act 2002 as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, chief officers can designate certain powers to any person who is employed by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and is under the direction and control of that chief officer as a Police Community Support Officer. This excludes the most intrusive powers that are available to police officers, such as arrest and stop and search, and powers under the Terrorism Act 2000.

Special Constables are warranted police officers and have the same powers as any other constable.

The Department has not issued guidance to forces or PCCs on these powers. The College of Policing has issued guidance for PCCs, police forces, and anyone else looking to better understand the PSCO role. This is available online [PCSO handbook](#) | [College of Policing](#)

■ Police: Translation Services

Rupert Lowe:

[11103]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of (a) translation and (b) interpretation services provided by (a) all police forces and (b) Norfolk Constabulary each year for the previous five years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not hold information relating to the proportion of budgets spent on translation and interpretation services for police forces.

Decisions on how to use funding and resources are an operational matter for Chief Constables.

Police and Crime Commissioners are best placed to make resourcing decisions within their communities based on their local knowledge and experience.

■ Special Constables

Josh Newbury:

[\[10843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to increase the number of special constables in (a) Staffordshire and (b) England.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government recognises and values the professionalism, dedication and sacrifice shown by special constables in their work. Special constables, along with the full range of volunteers in policing, make a vital contribution to keeping our communities safe.

Data published by the Home Office in the 'Police Workforce, England and Wales' statistical bulletin shows the number of special constables (headcount) in England has declined by 70% since a peak of 19,619 in March 2012 down to 5,860 in March 2024. In Staffordshire Police the number of special constables has declined by 74% from a peak of 512 in March 2012 down to 132 in March 2024.

The Home Secretary has made a clear commitment to strengthen neighbourhood policing through the introduction of a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. The Guarantee will put thousands of additional neighbourhood police personnel back on the beat, including special constables, as part of the Government's Safer Streets mission.

■ Visas: Horticulture

Claire Hanna:

[\[10787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has had recent discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive on the potential merits of implementing a bespoke visa for for the horticulture sector in Northern Ireland.

Seema Malhotra:

There have been no discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive on the potential merits of implementing a bespoke visa for the horticulture sector in Northern Ireland. The UK operates a national immigration system, covering all areas of the country. This includes the Seasonal Worker route, which specifically enables the UK horticulture sector, including those in Northern Ireland, to recruit seasonal workers.

■ Visas: Overseas Students

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[10881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the report by the Migration Advisory Committee entitled Graduate route: rapid review, published on 14 May 2024, on her Department's policies relating to international students.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Secretary set out in her written statement of the 30 July 2024, the Government will continue with the measures announced by the previous government

on 23 May in response to the Migration Advisory Committee review of the Graduate route.

The Government values the economic and academic contribution that international students make to this country, including those here on the Graduate route, and that is why it is important to ensure that the system is effective and not open to abuse.

■ **Visas: Palestinians**

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[10869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of creating a visa scheme for disabled Palestinians to access treatment in the UK.

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[10870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will she create a specific visa scheme for seriously injured Palestinians to access treatment in the UK.

Seema Malhotra:

The Government is determined to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and rapidly increase aid, ensuring humanitarian support is reaching people there.

There are existing provisions that allow Palestinians to come to the UK for Private Medical Treatment under the Immigration Rules. Where a relevant application is made consideration will be given to exceptional circumstances or where there are compelling or compassionate grounds.

It should be noted that the World Health Organisation (WHO) position is that people who are medically evacuated should stay as close to home as possible, so that they remain amongst those who are more likely to understand their language and culture, and so that their return home, when ready, is easier.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ **Cultural Heritage: Environment Protection**

Sir Oliver Dowden:

[\[11007\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the protection of historic landscapes which have inspired literature from development.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government is committed to ensuring that our most important and cherished landscapes are appropriately protected so they can be enjoyed by future generations.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out how planning policies and decisions should recognise the character and beauty of the countryside, and local authorities are expected to protect heritage assets which can include landscape and setting of listed buildings.

It is open to local authorities to take the historic literary importance of a place into account in their decisions if they find that it is a material consideration.

■ **Devolution: Cornwall**

Ben Maguire: [\[11136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of devolving legislative powers to a Cornish Assembly.

Jim McMahon:

The Government is committed to transferring power out of Westminster and into local communities; 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. An ambitious new framework for English devolution will be published in due course. We intend this framework will set out an attractive, far-reaching offer which will increase devolution across all parts of England, including Cornwall. I am also pleased we have recently confirmed we are minded to progress a non-mayoral devolution agreement as part of the county's journey to deeper devolution.

■ **Green Belt: Oxford**

Freddie van Mierlo: [\[11124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will include greater protection of the Oxford Green Belt in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government has no plans to include in the National Planning Policy Framework additional protections for Oxford Green Belt beyond those that apply to all green belts in England.

■ **Housing: Carbon Emissions**

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[11093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure new homes help the UK meet its net zero commitments.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[11094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of her Department's policies to build new homes on the UK's carbon budget.

Alex Norris:

Carbon Budgets are set over a five-year period, so far six Carbon Budgets have been set in law. Government will continue to monitor our suite of policies to ensure we are on track to meeting our Carbon Budgets.

Future standards next year will set our new homes and buildings on a path that moves away from relying on volatile fossil fuels and ensures they are fit for a net zero future. These homes will be future proofed with low carbon heating and high levels of energy efficiency. No further energy efficiency retrofit work will be necessary to enable them to become zero-carbon over time as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise.

To reduce the embodied carbon of buildings, we must decarbonise every part of the supply chain in their construction, from the manufacture and transport of materials to the construction processes on site. The Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy and the Transport Decarbonisation set out how large sectors of the economy will decarbonise.

■ **Housing: Construction**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[11110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance is available to Local Planning Authorities on lowering house building targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

In our recent consultation on reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, we proposed making the standard method for assessing housing needs mandatory, requiring local authorities to plan for the resulting housing need figure, planning for a lower figure only when they can demonstrate hard constraints and that they have exhausted all other options

■ **Leisure Centres: Government Assistance**

Josh Newbury:

[\[10847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help support local authorities to keep council-owned leisure centres open.

Jim McMahon:

The Government recognises the challenges local authorities are facing as demand increases for critical services. Resetting the relationship between national and local government and improving how local government is funded in this Parliament, are crucial in ensuring local people get the support and services they need and deserve.

The majority of funding in the local government finance settlement is unringfenced recognising that local leaders are best placed to identify local priorities. This includes funding for leisure centres. Future local authority funding decisions will be a matter for the next Spending Review and Local Government Finance Settlement.

■ Local Government Finance

Sir Oliver Dowden:

[\[11011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to increase funding for Local Authorities in line with NHS pay awards to ensure that other council services, including SEND and social care provision, are not affected.

Jim McMahon:

We have announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding in 2025/26 for local government to deliver core services, of which £600 million is for social care and £700 million to support general pressures. We have also announced a £1 billion uplift to special educational needs and disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision funding, the second biggest ever year-on-year increase.

Further details of total allocations will be made in the Local Government Finance Settlement.

Local authorities are independent employers responsible for the management and organisation of their own workforces, including remuneration. The Government recognise the challenges that local authorities are facing as demand increases for critical services. We have listened to voices across the sector, and we have prioritised local government at this Budget.

■ Minority Groups: Cornwall

Ben Maguire:

[\[11137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of (a) recognition of the Cornish as a national minority under the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and (b) protection of the Cornish language under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages on policy on devolving powers to Cornwall.

Jim McMahon:

The Government is committed to seeing more areas benefit from devolution agreements, with new powers that will allow them to play a leading role in delivering growth and bringing economic benefit to their communities. In taking forward any devolution agreement, the Government recognises the importance of considering the distinct culture, history and identity of Cornish people and will always have regard to its international obligations.

■ Parish and Town Councils: Finance

Mike Amesbury:

[\[10762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on the level of reserves being held (a) Parish and (b) Town councils.

Jim McMahon:

The Government considers reserves to be an important part of the resources available to local government, and encourages councils to consider how they can support local services while maintaining appropriate levels to support sustainability, future investment, and ability to respond to shocks.

The Government acknowledges that reserve levels have fallen recently, following a significant increase during the pandemic, and will continue to monitor the level of local authority reserves to ensure that it provides the resilience needed.

■ Planning Permission**Mr Luke Charters:**[\[10964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to conduct a review into local authorities' pre-application processes.

Mr Luke Charters:[\[10965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will meet the hon. Member for York Outer to discuss reforms to speed up the planning process.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework stresses the importance of good quality pre-application discussions between local planning authorities and applicants, and the role that these can play in improving outcomes. The Government strongly encourages local planning authorities to utilise best practice guidance for pre-application engagement and planning performance agreements published by the Planning Advisory Service.

The King's Speech announced that the Government would introduce a Planning and Infrastructure Bill to accelerate housebuilding and infrastructure delivery. This will include measures to modernise planning committees in order to improve decision making. Further details will be announced in due course.

I look forward to working with colleagues during the passage of the Bill and would be happy to receive representations on our proposals from my hon Friend and honourable members.

■ Property Management Companies: Service Charges**Mike Amesbury:**[\[10767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to end the practice of fleecehold.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer I gave to Question UIN [9987](#) on 28 October 2024.

■ Right to Buy Scheme

Mike Amesbury:

[\[11031\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of enabling Mayors of Combined Authorities to suspend the right to buy.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government believes it is right that those tenants who have lived in, and paid rent on, their social homes for many years retain the right to purchase their property at a reasonable discount. As such, we will not be ending or suspending the Right to Buy scheme.

We are, however, committed to better protecting our existing stock of social rented homes and we have reviewed the increased Right to Buy discounts introduced in 2012. As announced at Budget, we are now taking action to return maximum Right to Buy cash discounts to pre-2012 levels.

We will also increase protections on newly built social housing and allow councils to keep 100% of the receipts generated by a Right to Buy sale. This will enable councils to scale-up delivery of social homes for those who need them most. We also intend to review Right to Buy more widely, including looking at eligibility criteria and further protections for newly built social housing, on which a consultation will be launched shortly.

■ Social Rented Housing: Freedom of Information

Apsana Begum:

[\[11053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to registered social landlords.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government has confirmed that we will take action to introduce new access to information requirements for social housing tenants. This will enable social housing tenants of private registered providers, such as housing associations, to access the information they need about their homes from their landlords. The Government will set out further details of these requirements in due course.

■ Social Rented Housing: Nottinghamshire

Lee Anderson:

[\[11045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of immigration on the length of waiting lists for social housing in (a) Ashfield and (b) Mansfield district.

Matthew Pennycook:

The department does not hold information on the immigration status of those on waiting lists. If a person's immigration status does not allow them recourse to public

funds, then they are not eligible for an allocation of social housing. Ashfield District Council has a local connection test in place to determine who qualifies for social housing and Mansfield District Council has both a residency and local connection test.

■ Social Rented Housing: Staffordshire

David Williams:

[\[10929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support councils to build additional social housing in (a) Stoke-on-Trent and (b) Staffordshire.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my Hon Friend to the answer I gave to Question UIN [10272](#) on 28 October 2024.

■ Social Rented Housing: Waiting Lists

Rupert Lowe:

[\[11113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on the number of people who are not UK citizens that are on a waiting list for (a) social and (b) council housing (i) in the UK and (ii) for Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

Matthew Pennycook:

The department will publish information on the number of households on the housing register in England by nationality of lead tenant alongside the Social Housing Lettings 2023-24 statistical release on 5 December 2024. The department has not previously collected this data.

JUSTICE

■ Administration of Justice

Lloyd Hatton:

[\[11138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what her planned timetable is to respond to her Department's consultation entitled Open Justice: the way forward which closed on 7 September 2023.

Heidi Alexander:

The Ministry of Justice ran a Call for Evidence from 11 May to 7 September 2023 under the previous Government. It was the first system-wide public assessment on open justice and transparency in over ten years. The consultation received a wide volume of responses that are being carefully analysed and I am considering next steps. I would like to express my thanks to all stakeholders who contributed their views, which will inform future policy developments and priorities in this essential area.

■ Domestic Abuse: Courts

Andrew Cooper:

[\[11444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the average time was for a domestic violence case to be heard in court in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England in each of the last five years.

Alex Davies-Jones:

It is not possible to separately identify cases of domestic violence, which will be recorded under the specific offences for which they are prosecuted, for example, co intentional strangulation or suffocation.

This Government inherited a record and rising court backlog which have seen too many victims waiting far too long for justice. We are committed to bearing down on the caseload to speed up the delivery of justice for all victims.

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.

■ Domestic Abuse: Criminal Proceedings

Andrew Cooper:

[\[11441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate she has made of the number of victims of domestic violence who have withdrawn their cases due to court delays in each of the last five years.

Alex Davies-Jones:

It is not possible to separately identify cases of domestic violence, which will be recorded under the specific offences for which they are prosecuted, for example, intentional strangulation or suffocation.

Victims and survivors of domestic abuse also may choose to withdraw their cases for a number of reasons (for example, personal reasons).

This Government inherited 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 caseload backlog to speed up the delivery of justice for all victims.

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.

■ Family Proceedings: Court Orders

Mohammad Yasin: [\[11023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to reduce the backlog in the administration of family court orders.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The HMCTS Reform Programme has introduced several new digital services within the Family Courts, enhancing and automating the administration of family court orders. These services encompass Divorce, Financial Remedy, and Public Law Proceedings.

Additionally, HMCTS has transitioned much of the administration of these services to the newly established Courts and Tribunals Service Centres. Centralising work to national centres has allowed for better management of work fluctuations across the various services; improved data collection on HMCTS performance and identification of areas for enhancement; and more effective alignment of working patterns to meet demand.

Currently, HMCTS is piloting a new digital service for private law proceedings, aiming to replicate the administrative improvements seen in other family services. This service is scheduled to be implemented across England and Wales by the end of 2025.

Whilst this new service is being piloted, HMCTS continues to prioritise the orders waiting to be administered according to their urgency and are using specialist order production teams to target delay at specific local court courts.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Animal Experiments: Public Consultation

Sarah Champion: [\[11001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he plans to consult (a) civil society, (b) animal protection organisations and (c) the public on policy decisions on animal testing.

Feryal Clark:

The Labour Manifesto included a commitment to “partner with scientists, industry, and civil society as we work towards the phasing out of animal testing”, which is a long-term goal. The government will be consulting civil society and animal protection organisations as this process unfolds.

■ Animal Experiments: Standards

Sarah Champion: [\[11002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he is taking steps to (a) collaborate with international partners on best practices and (b) align

regulatory frameworks for animal testing; and what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on reducing reliance on animal testing.

Feryal Clark:

Many of the regulations on animal testing are backed by international agreements and the government is keen to ensure regulatory alignment where appropriate. We are engaging with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), who represent the UK at the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use, on how to accelerate the acceptance of data generated using non-animal methods for drug safety decision making. Government officials and representatives of the NC3Rs regularly attend international meetings to collaborate on best practice and to consider approaches to reducing reliance on animal testing.

■ **Life Sciences: Tuberculosis**

Jim Shannon:

[\[10731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to support the life sciences sector to develop drugs to eliminate TB.

Feryal Clark:

The Government is committed to renewing UK leadership in Life Sciences, working in partnership with industry to drive innovation and treatments in key disease areas which help patients.

The Medical Research Council have funded [a project at University College London](#) to develop new antibiotics for the treatment of TB. Our Joint Global Health Trials Scheme is also collaborating between MRC, FCDO, the National Institute for Health Research, and the Wellcome Trust on a project specifically looking to improve outcomes for children with TB. We will continue to work with and support the sector in developing treatments for diseases such as TB.

■ **Pornography: Internet**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[11362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking with her international counterparts to tackle the sharing of illegal pornographic material online.

Feryal Clark:

We are committed to working closely with our international partners on approaches to ensure tech companies are held to account for addressing illegal and harmful content online. We have a number of bilateral agreements which include online safety. In particular, the online safety and security memorandum of understanding with Australia commits us to increasing cooperation between our respective law enforcement agencies and regulators to enhance detection and enforcement capabilities. We will continue to identify opportunities to advance multilateral cooperation, including through the OECD and G7.

■ Project Gigabit: Broadband

James Cartlidge: [\[11018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what proportion of Project Gigabit's £5bn in funding will be used to deliver broadband in (a) rural and (b) urban areas.

James Cartlidge: [\[11019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he plans to divert any of the £5bn in funding for Project Gigabit to urban areas.

Chris Bryant:

Project Gigabit is designed to deliver gigabit-capable broadband to premises that will not be built to by the market without subsidy.

It is not possible to specify the proportion of Project Gigabit funding that will be allocated to rural and urban areas, as this depends on suppliers' commercial rollout, which is subject to change. Funding will continue to be provided where it is needed. However, between April 2022 and March 2023, 90% of premises benefiting from government broadband schemes were in rural areas.

TRANSPORT

■ Bicycles: Low Incomes

Uma Kumaran: [\[10899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with (a) the Mayor of London and (b) other mayors on improving access to cycles for people on low incomes.

Simon Lightwood:

Ministers and officials meet regularly with Mayors and their representatives to discuss a wide range of transport issues, including enabling more people to walk, wheel and cycle.

■ Cars: Digital Technology

Sarah Champion: [\[11004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has had recent discussions with car manufacturers on the potential impact of digitally connected cars on the safety of domestic abuse survivors.

Lilian Greenwood:

Responsibility for domestic abuse policy rests with the Home Office. The Government has set out an ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade.

The Department for Transport has not carried out discussions with car manufacturers on this issue.

■ London Underground: Noise**Luke Taylor:** [\[10927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with the Mayor of London on levels of noise pollution on the London Underground.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State has not had discussions with the Mayor of London specifically on levels of noise pollution on the London Underground. Ministers and officials have regular conversations with Transport for London on a variety of issues. However, transport in London is devolved to the Mayor, and TfL is responsible for the operation of London's transport network.

■ Mode Shift Revenue Support Scheme**Dr Kieran Mullan:** [\[10803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will provide additional funding for the Mode Shift Revenue Support scheme.

Simon Lightwood:

Live grant awards for this financial year total £20.8m, which is in line with historic levels of funding for this scheme. Future budgets are being determined as part of the continuing Spending Review.

■ Purfleet Port**Grahame Morris:** [\[10689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department has on the number of times the Ro-Ro cargo ferry Laureline called in Purfleet port in the 2023-24 financial year.

Mike Kane:

According to the Department's vessel arrival statistics, in the calendar year 2023, the merchant vessel Laureline (9823352) did not call at Purfleet port. The Department cannot disclose data pertaining to 2024 as these data are unpublished and will only be available upon publication of the Department's annual Port Freight statistics 2024, which is expected to be in summer 2025.

■ Railways: Electrification**Dr Kieran Mullan:** [\[10806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to increase the speed of rail electrification.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government expects electrification to play an important role in our programme to achieve our Net Zero 2050 target and improve the passenger experience.

■ Road Traffic: South Basildon and East Thurrock

James McMurdock:

[\[11805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help reduce congestion in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government is committed to maintaining and renewing our road network so it can serve all road users and is safe. Traffic management of local roads is the responsibility of local traffic authorities who are best placed to understand local circumstances and needs.

Traffic authorities are subject to the statutory network management duty which requires them to manage their roads to secure the 'expeditious movement' of all traffic including pedestrians, with a view to reducing congestion, and they have a wide range of tools already available to them to enable this.

■ Road Works: Fees and Charges

Tom Hayes:

[\[11732\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she is taking steps to support local authorities in establishing lane rental schemes.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government recognises that lane rental schemes have proven to be an effective way of reducing congestion from works on the busiest streets at the busiest times. I have just approved a new scheme in East Sussex. To support local areas who wish to apply for a lane rental scheme, the Department is updating guidance and producing templates to make the process easier. Resources are being allocated to ensure bids are assessed promptly, and officials are currently speaking to local authorities that plan to apply for lane rental.

■ Road Works: Licensing

Tom Hayes:

[\[11733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she is taking steps to support local authorities in improving enforcement of licence conditions for street works.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department for Transport introduced a performance-based inspections regime in April 2023 to ensure utility companies were incentivised to produce reinstatements that are fit for purpose following works and comply with site safety requirements. This change allows authorities to inspect utility companies with high rates of defects in their reinstatements and safety checks more often than those who comply with the statutory Specification for the Reinstatement of Openings in Highways and the safety code of practice. Utility companies pay for each of these inspections. Highway authorities also have the power to direct utility companies to carry out remedial works

at the utility company's expense if they identify reinstatements that do not meet the standards in the code.

The previous Government consulted on raising the level of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) available for some street works offences including breaching permit conditions. We will publish a response to that consultation in due course.

■ Road Works: Utilities

Tom Hayes:

[\[11734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce disruption to road users from utility companies undertaking road works.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government is committed to supporting the effective planning and management of road works by utility companies and local authorities. Works are needed to install and maintain the services on which we all rely and to, for example, roll out broadband and install electric vehicle charge points and to repair potholes. We continue to improve our Street Manager digital service, which is used by all utility companies and authorities to raise and approve the permits needed for works. The service also streams open data on live and planned works which can then be used for journey planning services. We are supporting the roll-out of more lane rental schemes to reduce congestion from works on the busiest streets at the busiest times. We are keen to explore ways to improve the legislative framework, and I will publish a response in due course to a consultation on raising fines and introducing overrun charges at weekends.

■ UK Airspace Design Service

Sarah Olney:

[\[11020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the consultation entitled Creating a UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS), published on 22 October 2024, what steps she plans to take to allow communities to provide comments to the proposed UKADS on new flight path systems.

Mike Kane:

As a public consultation, any interested party is welcome to provide feedback on our proposals to set up a UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS).

The CAA's Airspace Change Process (CAP1616) sets out how airspace change proposals should be developed and delivered. It includes requirements for the airspace change sponsor to consult those affected by airspace change at different stages of the process and consider their views. The UKADS consultation envisages that once up and running, the UKADS and partner airports would continue to engage and consult with communities on airspace change proposals through a defined process.

Sarah Olney:

[\[11021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the consultation entitled Creating a UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS), published on 22 October 2024, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of her proposal to establish the UKADS on the delivery timeline of the airspace modernisation programme.

Mike Kane:

The Government's plans for the UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) have been developed to strengthen delivery in implementing the airspace modernisation programme. They aim to improve delivery confidence of the Future Airspace Integration Strategy (FASI) programme, initially focusing on the complex London area. The plans anticipate that the UKADS will take on existing airspace changes, so it is important that existing airspace sponsors continue to develop their proposals.

The UKADS will act as a single guiding mind to design and implement holistic airspace design in a coordinated and efficient manner. This will create a system that's fit for the future by delivering quicker routes, easing delays, and reducing harmful emissions.

■ UK Airspace Design Service: Staff

Sarah Olney:

[\[11022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled, Creating a UK Airspace Design Service, published on 22 October 2024, whether the service will be staffed from existing Departmental staff.

Mike Kane:

The consultation published on 22 October outlines our proposals to set up a UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS), initially undertaken by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL) through a change to its air traffic services licence. NERL is independent and not resourced from existing Departmental staff.

TREASURY

■ Civil Servants

John Glen:

[\[10443\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason it is the Government's to lift the Civil Service headcount cap that had been announced by the previous administration; and if she will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of this policy.

Darren Jones:

This government moved away from capping civil service headcount to an approach that ensures departments consider overall value for money in resourcing decisions.

To this end it has introduced of a 2% target for reduction to administration budgets in financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26 and a stop to all non-essential spending on consultancy, with an aim to halve spending in future years. This government has also

committed to developing a long-term strategic plan for a more efficient and effective civil service, including bold options to improve skills, harness digital technology and drive better outcomes for public services.

Decisions relating to the cost of the civil service workforce will be considered as part of the Spending Review process. HM Treasury and the Cabinet Office will work closely with departments to develop plans that achieve the government's reform objectives for the civil service.

■ Pensioners: Tax Rates and Bands

Lee Anderson: [\[11042\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a higher tax threshold for pensioners.

James Murray:

The Government is committed to making sure older people can live with the dignity and respect they deserve in retirement. The income tax Personal Allowance will continue to exceed the basic and full new State Pension in 2024-25. This means that pensioners whose sole income is the full new State Pension or basic State Pension without any increments will continue to not pay any income tax.

■ Pensions

David Chadwick: [\[11127\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reinstating trivial commutation following the changes to the Lifetime Allowance this year.

Tulip Siddiq:

For defined benefit (DB) pensions, trivial commutation continues to exist. If an individual's total pension wealth across all DB pension schemes (excluding their state pension) is no more than £30,000, they may be able to surrender their pension for a taxable one-off payment (though usually up to 25% is available tax-free as with other kinds of pension withdrawal). Alternatively, if an individual's pension within a scheme is valued at no more than £10,000, it may be possible to surrender this for a taxable one-off payment without any assessment against their total pension wealth.

For defined contribution pensions, trivial commutation was removed because Pension Freedoms reforms meant that trivial commutation was no longer needed.

■ Private Education: VAT

Sir Julian Smith: [\[10716\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to apply VAT to small private schools offering Montessori education where pre-school age children are in the same classes as older children.

James Murray:

From 1 January 2025, the 20% standard rate of VAT will apply to all education services, vocational training, and boarding services provided by private schools for a charge. This will apply to any fees charged after 29 July 2024 for terms starting after 1 January 2025.

The government has listened to feedback regarding the definition of “nursery class” used in the draft legislation. To ensure the legislation achieves the policy intent of keeping nursery education exempt from VAT across the UK, the definition of a nursery class has been amended to: “a class that is composed wholly (or almost wholly) of children who are under compulsory school age or, in Scotland, school age, and would not be expected to attain that age while in that class”. Therefore, providing the majority of children in the nursery class are under compulsory school age and aren’t expected to turn compulsory school age that year, the whole nursery class will remain exempt from VAT. Nursery schools not attached to a private school will remain exempt from VAT, regardless of the age of their pupils.

Further detail can be found in the government’s summary of responses published here:

[Government Response to the Technical Note on Applying VAT to Private Schools Fees and Removing the Business Rates Charitable Rate Relief.pdf](#)

Public Houses: Ashfield**Lee Anderson:****[11043]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to help support pubs in Ashfield constituency.

James Murray:

Pubs make an enormous contribution to our economy and society, and this is recognised in the tax system. At the Autumn Budget, the Chancellor cut alcohol duty on qualifying draught products – approximately 60% of the alcoholic drinks sold in pubs. This represents an overall reduction in duty bills of over £85m a year and is equivalent to a 1p duty reduction on a typical pint. This reduction increased the relief available on draught products to 13.9%. The Chancellor also confirmed her intention to introduce permanently lower business rates for high street retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, including pubs, from 2026-27, and in the interim extend the current RHL relief for 1-year at 40%, up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business.

Public Houses: Government Assistance**Sarah Olney:****[10753]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to support (a) pubs and (b) breweries in (i) Richmond Park constituency and (ii) the United Kingdom.

James Murray:

Pubs make an enormous contribution to our economy and society, and this is recognised in the tax system. At the Autumn Budget, the Chancellor cut alcohol duty on qualifying draught products – approximately 60% of the alcoholic drinks sold in pubs. This represents an overall reduction in duty bills of over £85m a year and is equivalent to a 1p duty reduction on a typical pint. This reduction increased the relief available on draught products to 13.9%. The Chancellor also confirmed her intention to introduce permanently lower business rates for high street retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties, including pubs, from 2026-27, and in the interim extend the current RHL relief for 1-year at 40%, up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business.

■ Revenue and Customs: Telephone Services

Rupert Lowe:[\[11114\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the (a) average waiting time for people calling and (b) time people spent on hold for HMRC was in each of the last five years.

James Murray:

HMRC telephony performance data, including the average speed of answering a customer's call, is published on a quarterly basis and can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-quarterly-performance-updates>

The definition of 'average speed of answering a customer's call' is the average time spent waiting in the queue for an adviser. This is time that the customer finished listening to HMRC's automated messages and completed their selection from HMRC's automated menu to the time when they get to speak to an adviser.

The below table shows the amount of time people spent on hold with HMRC – this is when a call has been answered by an adviser and the individual has subsequently been put on hold. The data covers the last five years, broken down by quarter:

2019 Q1	2019 Q2	2019 Q3	2019 Q4
1min 21s	1min 6s	1min 14s	1min 6s
2020 Q1	2020 Q2	2020 Q3	2020 Q4
1min 2s	1min 9s	1min 19s	1min 28s
2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4
1min 22s	1min 25s	1min 43s	1min 33s
2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4
1min 17s	1min 8s	1min 11s	1min 10s
2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4

2019 Q1	2019 Q2	2019 Q3	2019 Q4
1min 6s	1min 6s	1min 20s	1min 12s

■ Treasury: Recruitment

John Glen: [\[10988\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 4258 on Treasury: public appointments, if she will provide this data by the recruitment principles exception used by each grade.

James Murray:

Since 30 May 2024, the following appointments by exception have been made:

Exception 1 (Temporary Appointments) – 22 appointments. The grades of these appointments are Student, Senior Executive Officer, Grade 7, and SCS2.

Exception 3 (Secondments) – 8 appointments. The grades of these appointments are Higher Executive Officer, Senior Executive Officer, Grade 7 and SCS1.

Exception 10 (Conversion to permanency for those appointed under Exception 1 or 2) – Fewer than 5 appointments.

Where the number of individuals covered is fewer than 5, we consider that to provide an exact figure would constitute the disclosure of personal data. The 'Student' grade is used for staff appointed to short term roles via cross Civil Service internship schemes.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ Business: Equality

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

■ Chemicals: Regulation

Alex Mayer:

[\[11371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the completion status is of each (a) key delivery objective and (b) activity in the UK REACH work programme for 2023-24.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), acting as the UK REACH Agency, submitted to Defra in April this year their annual report which detailed the completion status of key delivery objectives and activities contained in the 2023-24 UK REACH work

programme. Once approved by Ministers, the annual report will be published on HSE's website.

■ **Child Maintenance Service: Standards**

Richard Tice:

[\[10889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to (a) improve the (i) effectiveness and (ii) efficiency of the Child Maintenance Service and (b) help tackle unpaid child maintenance.

Andrew Western:

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

The CMS has a range of strong enforcement powers that can be used against those who consistently refuse to meet their obligations to provide financial support to their children including deducting directly from earnings, bank accounts and forcing the sale of a property. The Department plans to streamline the enforcement process further by removing the requirement to obtain a court issued liability order, and instead allow the Secretary of State to issue an administrative liability order. Introducing this simpler administrative process will enable the CMS to take faster action against those paying parents who actively avoid their responsibilities.

A CMS modernisation programme is ongoing which is delivering services with increased effectiveness and efficiency by optimising the use of digital channels and self-service. These efficiencies will make it easier for customers to report changes and report non-payment so CMS caseworkers can focus on the collection of unpaid child maintenance.

■ **Department for Work and Pensions: Telephone Services**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[11115\]](#)

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

Andrew Western:

The table below shows the Average Speed of Answer and Total Hold Time for all people calling DWP for the last 5 business years, with 2024 to 2025 being to 20th Oct' 2024* only, that being the last date for which data is available.

	AVERAGE SPEED OF ANSWER (HH:MM:SS)	AVERAGE HOLD TIME (HH:MM:SS)
2020 – 2021	00:08:33	00:00:32

	AVERAGE SPEED OF ANSWER (HH:MM:SS)	AVERAGE HOLD TIME (HH:MM:SS)
2021 – 2022	00:09:39	00:00:36
2022 – 2023	00:08:22	00:00:28
2023 – 2024	00:08:34	00:00:26
2024 to date	*00:07:58	*00:00:25

*To date

Please note, the data shown is unpublished management information, collected and intended for internal departmental use. The figures provided may therefore be subject to retrospective change and have not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standards.

■ Housing Benefit: Young People

Siân Berry:

[\[10858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2024 to Question 7923 on Housing Benefit: Young People, if she will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of adjusting the housing benefit taper for people in supported accommodation; and with which stakeholders he plans to consider the interaction between Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for people residing in supported housing and temporary accommodation.

Sir Stephen Timms:

As you are aware, there is a challenge presented by the interaction between Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for those residing in supported housing and temporary accommodation. We are considering options to improve work incentives for residents of supported housing and temporary accommodation, while taking into account the views of stakeholders.

We have engaged with a range of stakeholders including Centrepoint, St Mungo's, BHT Sussex, the Cardinal Hume Centre, Your Place and Homeless Link about this issue and plan to continue conversations with these and other organisations in the future about this issue.

■ Social Security Benefits: Disability

Alex Easton:

[\[11519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she is taking steps to reform the disability benefits system for people living with multiple sclerosis.

Sir Stephen Timms:

This government is committed to breaking down the barriers to opportunity for disabled people and people with health conditions, including people with multiple

sclerosis, improving our employment and health support offer and tackling rising levels of economic inactivity.

We will be considering our own approach to social security in due course and welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with disabled people and the people that represent them to address some of the most challenging issues under this new government.

More disabled people and people with health conditions will be supported to enter and stay in work, by devolving more power to local areas so they can shape a joined-up work, health, and skills offer that suits the needs of the people they serve.

These plans to reform the system are central to our missions of kickstarting economic growth and breaking down barriers to opportunity.

■ **Universal Credit: Care Leavers**

Steve Darling:

[\[11452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the over-25 rate of universal credit to care leavers.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Government supports care leavers by offering a series of safeguards and easements aimed at simplifying and improving their interaction with the benefit system. This includes single care leavers qualifying for the more generous one-bedroom Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate until their 25th birthday.

The Government is committed to reviewing Universal Credit. Details of the review will be set out in due course.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

TRANSPORT

■ Driving Tests: Waiting Lists

Rupert Lowe:

[\[11413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the average waiting time was per driving test centre in (a) the UK and (b) Great Yarmouth constituency.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 30 October 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Lilian Greenwood:

The average waiting time data per driving test centre (DTC) in the UK for September 2024 is contained within the attached document. The table below shows the national average waiting time, and those DTCs that serve the Great Yarmouth constituency.

DRIVING TEST CENTRE	AVERAGE WAITING TIME (SEPTEMBER 2024)
Lowestoft (Mobbs Way)	9
Norwich (Peachman Way)	22.2
Norwich (Jupiter Road)	9.4
National	19

Attachments:

1. **Copy of WPQ-00025614 September 2024 average waiting time data - non part time DTCs (002).xlsx**