



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 12 November 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:33 P.M., 12 November 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

CONTENTS

ANSWERS	7	■ Government Departments:	
ATTORNEY GENERAL	7	Public Expenditure	14
■ Crime: Rural Areas	7	■ Infected Blood Inquiry	14
BUSINESS AND TRADE	7	■ Ministers: Aviation	14
■ Employment: Manufacturing Industries	7	■ Trade agreements: USA	15
■ Foreign Investment in UK	8	CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	16
■ Internet: Sales	8	■ BBC: Finance	16
■ Iron and Steel: Energy	9	DEFENCE	16
■ Living Wage and Minimum Wage: East of England	9	■ Air Force: Labour Turnover	16
■ Living Wage and Minimum Wage: Norfolk	10	■ Armed Forces Covenant	17
■ Products: Labelling	10	■ Armed Forces: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder	17
■ Trade Agreements: Dispute Resolution	10	■ Army: Labour Turnover	18
■ Trade Agreements: USA	11	■ Army: Pay	18
■ Treaties: Colombia	11	■ AUKUS	18
CABINET OFFICE	12	■ Defence: Expenditure	19
■ Cabinet Office: Buildings	12	■ Defence: Procurement	19
■ Cabinet Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution	12	■ F-35 Aircraft: Procurement	19
■ Cabinet Office: Official Cars	12	■ Military Decorations	20
■ Covid-19 Inquiry	13	■ Ministry of Defence: Buildings	20
■ Death: Coronavirus	13	■ Ministry of Defence: Data Processing	21
		■ Ministry of Defence: Labour Turnover	21

■ Ministry of Defence: Procurement	22	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	35
■ Navy: Labour Turnover	22	■ Animal Welfare	35
■ Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Labour Turnover	23	■ Animal Welfare: Finance	35
■ Veterans: Essex	23	■ Animal Welfare: Fines	35
■ Veterans: Pensions	24	■ Bottles: Deposit Return Schemes	35
EDUCATION	25	■ Farms: Costs	36
■ Children in Care: Young Offenders	25	■ Fisheries: Quotas	36
■ Equality: Curriculum	26	■ Fisheries: Territorial Waters	37
■ Further Education: Special Educational Needs	26	■ Livestock: Animal Housing	38
■ Lifelong Education	27	■ Packaging: Recycling	38
■ Schools: Knives	27	■ Per- and Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances	38
■ Schools: Transport	28	■ Plastics	39
■ Special Educational Needs: Finance	28	■ Plastics: Waste	39
■ Special Educational Needs: Lincolnshire	29	■ Slaughterhouses: Animal Welfare	39
■ Special Educational Needs: Northumberland	30	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	40
■ Teachers: Pensions	31	■ Abduction: Children	40
■ Universities: China	31	■ Arab States: Human Rights	40
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	32	■ Asylum: British Indian Ocean Territory	40
■ Carbon Emissions: National Grid	32	■ China: Trade Agreements	41
■ Energy: Prices	32	■ Diego Garcia: Migrants	41
■ Mineworkers' Pension Scheme	33	■ Gaza: Air Force	41
■ Nuclear Power: Regulation	33	■ Gaza: Humanitarian Aid	42
■ Oil and Natural Gas: Licensing	34	■ Government Hospitality: Wines	42
■ Solar Power and Wind Power: British Overseas Territories	34	■ Israel: F-35 Aircraft	42
		■ Mauritius: Telecommunications	43
		■ North Korea: Diplomatic Relations	43
		■ Pakistan: Blasphemy	44

■ Spain: Floods	44	■ Mental Health Services: Children and Young People	59
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	44	■ Mental Health Services: Essex	59
■ Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse	44	■ Mental Health Services: Finance	60
■ Ambulance Services: Misuse	45	■ Mental Health: Children	60
■ Bipolar Disorder: Health Services	45	■ Microplastics: Babies	60
■ Bipolar Disorder: Training	46	■ Migraines: Health Services	60
■ Bowel Cancer: Diagnosis	46	■ Nusinersen: East Midlands	61
■ Bowel Cancer: Health Services	47	■ Podiatry: Runcorn and Helsby	61
■ Breast Cancer: Genetics	47	■ Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Ambulance Services	62
■ Cancer: Clinical Trials	48	■ Prescriptions: Care Leavers	62
■ Cancer: Medical Treatments	49	■ Prostate Cancer: Drugs	62
■ Cancer: Young People	49	■ Prostate Cancer: Research	63
■ Charities: Employers' Contributions	50	■ Prostate Cancer: Screening	64
■ Counselling and Psychiatry: Regulation	50	■ Sodium Valproate and Surgical Mesh Implants: Compensation	64
■ General Practitioners	51	HOME OFFICE	65
■ General Practitioners: Essex	52	■ Abuse: Woman	65
■ Genetics: Research	52	■ Asylum: Housing	65
■ Health and Care Act 2022	53	■ Asylum: Refugees	66
■ Health Services: Waiting Lists	53	■ Community Policing: Lincolnshire	66
■ Hearing Aids: Batteries	53	■ Crime: Lancashire	67
■ Hospices: Northern Ireland	55	■ Crime: Rural Areas	67
■ Kidney Diseases: Transplant Surgery	55	■ Crime: Undocumented Migrants	67
■ Lyme Disease: Diagnosis and Medical Treatments	55	■ Dogs: Animal Experiments	68
■ Maternity Services	56	■ Immigration: Arrests and Prosecutions	69
■ Maternity Services: Women	56	■ Immigration: Domestic Abuse	69
■ Medical Equipment: Innovation	57	■ Immigration: Proof of Identity	69
■ Medical Equipment: Technology	57	■ Immigration: Scotland	70
■ Menopause	58		

■ Leicestershire Police: Finance	71	JUSTICE	83
■ Migrants: Homelessness	72	■ Domestic Abuse and Gender Based Violence: North Warwickshire	83
■ Radicalism	72	■ Emergency Calls: Hoaxes and False Alarms	83
■ Undocumented Migrants	74	■ Nature Conservation: Crime	84
■ Undocumented Migrants: Boats	74	■ Offenders: Rehabilitation	84
■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel	75	■ Prison Sentences	84
■ Undocumented Migrants: Hotels	75	■ Prisons: Mental Health Services	85
■ Visas: Migrant Workers	75	■ Repossession Orders	85
■ Visas: Overseas Students	76	■ Television Licences: Non-payment	86
HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION	77	NORTHERN IRELAND	86
■ Parliament: Public Participation	77	■ Broadband: Northern Ireland	86
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	78	■ InterTrade UK	86
■ Batteries: Storage	78	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY	87
■ Community Assets	78	■ Electronic Government	87
■ Community Land Trusts	79	■ Musculoskeletal Disorders: Research	87
■ Elections: Visual Impairment	79	■ Space Technology	87
■ Embassies: China	79	TRANSPORT	88
■ Freeports: Economic Situation	80	■ A47: Dual Carriageways	88
■ High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention	80	■ Active Travel: Regulation	88
■ Housing: Construction	81	■ Bus Services: Fares	88
■ Parking: Fees and Charges	81	■ Cycling: Insurance and Vehicle Number Plates	89
■ Social Rented Housing: Overcrowding	82	■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points	89
■ Social Rented Housing: Repairs and Maintenance	82	■ High Speed 2 Line: Compensation	89
■ Undocumented Migrants: Social Rented Housing	82	■ High Speed 2 Line: Euston Station	90
		■ P&O Ferries	90

■ Parking: Anti-social Behaviour	90	■ Stamp Duty Land Tax: Greater London	101
■ Railway Stations: Access	91	■ Treasury: Ministers' Private Offices	101
TREASURY	91	■ UK Trade with EU	101
■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax	91	WORK AND PENSIONS	102
■ Banking Hubs	91	■ Access to Work Programme: Arthritis	102
■ Banks: North Warwickshire and Bedworth	92	■ Advisory Services: Older Workers	102
■ Beer: Excise Duties	92	■ Employment Schemes	103
■ Business Rates: Northern Ireland	93	■ Employment: Disability	103
■ Business: Inheritance Tax	93	■ Employment: Musculoskeletal Disorders	104
■ Business: Money	94	■ Food Poverty	104
■ Employers' Contributions: Civil Society	94	■ Habitual Residence Test	105
■ Employers' Contributions: Government Departments	95	■ Household Support Fund: Gloucester	106
■ Employers' Contributions: Wales	95	■ Jobcentres: St Neots	106
■ Equity Release: Misrepresentation	95	■ National Insurance: Bulgaria and Romania	107
■ Imports: Companies	96	■ Pension Credit	107
■ Living Wage	96	■ State Retirement Pensions	108
■ Mobility Scooters: Import Duties	96	■ State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad	109
■ Office for Value for Money	97	■ State Retirement Pensions: Women	111
■ Office for Value for Money: Staff	97	■ Universal Credit: Migrants	111
■ Pensions: Inheritance Tax	98	WRITTEN STATEMENTS	112
■ Private Education: Employers' Contributions and VAT	98	CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	112
■ Public Sector: Pay	99	■ Launch of Youth Strategy	112
■ Revenue and Customs: Correspondence	99	EDUCATION	113
■ Russia: Freezing of Assets	100	■ Department for Education Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Guarantee	113
■ Stamp Duty Land Tax: First Time Buyers	100		

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	113	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	116
■ The UK's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution emissions reduction target under the Paris Agreement	113	■ Housing Design and Quality	116
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	114	■ Local Government Best Value	118
■ Reforms to The Bathing Water Regulations 2013	114	TREASURY	121
HOME OFFICE	115	■ Notification of Contingent Liability	121
■ Home Office contingent liability regarding accommodation provision under the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011	115	WORK AND PENSIONS	122
		■ Completing the Implementation of Universal Credit	122

Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Crime: Rural Areas

Stuart Anderson:

[12450]

To ask the Solicitor General, what steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates for rural crime.

Sarah Sackman:

This Government is committed to working with the police and other partners to address the blight of rural crime – broadly classified as any crime and anti-social behaviour occurring in rural areas. We are introducing tougher measures to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, stronger neighbourhood policing, and robust laws to prevent farm theft and fly-tippers.

We are recruiting 13,000 more neighbourhood police and police community support officers across England and Wales.

The National Police Chiefs' Council Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy 2022-2025 provides a framework through which policing, and its partners, can work together to tackle the most prevalent threats and emerging issues which predominantly affect rural communities.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutors work closely with local police officers to tackle farm equipment theft, fly-tipping and other rural crime, and officers from the National Wildlife Crime Unit to tackle wildlife offences.

The CPS provides specialist training to ensure that its prosecutors have the expert knowledge needed to prosecute rural crime.

Each CPS Area also has a crown prosecutor dedicated to act as a Wildlife, Rural and Heritage Crime Coordinator to ensure the specialist knowledge needed to prosecute such offending is readily available.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Employment: Manufacturing Industries

James McMurdock:

[13122]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to increase manufacturing jobs in (a) Essex and (b) nationally.

Sarah Jones:

Essex has a vibrant manufacturing sector and Basildon is home to many key businesses including Ford, Leonardo and New Holland. The strength of the Essex

economy means that it is home to two freeports including the Thames Freeport in the Right Honourable member's constituency.

Our new Industrial Strategy is central to the Government's Growth Mission. The Strategy will drive long-term sustainable, inclusive and secure growth throughout the UK, with advanced manufacturing being one of eight growth-driving sectors the strategy will support. The Strategy will support growth sectors to create high-quality, well-paid jobs across the country.

■ Foreign Investment in UK

Jim Shannon:

[\[12386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to encourage international investment across the UK.

Sarah Jones:

Attracting investment is one of the key pillars to the Government's growth mission and is vital to helping address the challenge of achieving sustained growth, improving productivity and increasing the number of good, well-skilled jobs across the country. At the International Investment Summit, we secured £63bn worth of investments across the whole of the UK, creating nearly 38,000 jobs. On top of this we have launched Invest 2035, our vision for a modern Industrial Strategy "Invest 2035": a credible, 10-year plan to deliver the certainty and stability businesses need to invest.

As an example of the many steps we are taking to encourage investment, we have today (12th November) launched the Clean Industries Bonus which will encourage investment in renewable energy projects.

■ Internet: Sales

Alex Mayer:

[\[12523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if his Department will bring forward legislative proposals to strengthen the duties of online marketplaces to protect consumers.

Justin Madders:

Online marketplaces, like other traders, will be required to comply with new laws arising from the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act, which the Government is currently implementing and updates the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. The Act sets out new 'banned practices' relating to the buying, selling, and publishing of fake consumer reviews and prohibiting 'drip pricing'. It also strengthens consumer law enforcement by giving the CMA new administrative powers, and the CMA and courts the ability to impose significant monetary penalties.

Alex Mayer:

[\[12524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if his Department will introduce an enforceable liability provision in legislation to ensure that consumers can seek redress for defective products bought via online marketplaces.

Justin Madders:

The UK's product liability legislation has been in place since 1987. My department is undertaking a review of this legislation and, as part of the review, we will consider the range and types of products that should be in scope, given recent technological advancements. We will also consider the ways that modern supply chains operate, as well as the parties and the circumstances in which they should be held liable for any damages caused by defective products.

I will keep the House updated on the Government's progress with this review and plans for engagement on this important area of law.

■ Iron and Steel: Energy

James McMurdock:

[\[12627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make a comparative assessment of energy prices for steel production in (a) the UK, (b) China, (c) Germany and (d) the US.

Sarah Jones:

The Government recognises that this continues to be a worrying time for the steel sector facing pressures due to global energy prices.

We are committed to minimising energy costs for steel, and all energy intensive industries, to help ensure they remain strong and competitive.

Further support through the new British Industry Supercharger should be worth (on average) around £24-£31 Per MegaWatt Hour (MWh) for eligible businesses, closing the competitive gap with their international competitors.

■ Living Wage and Minimum Wage: East of England

Ben Goldsborough:

[\[12839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many and what proportion of workers aged above 16 years old are paid within 50p of the (a) National Minimum Wage and (b) National Living Wage in (i) East Anglia and (ii) Norfolk.

Justin Madders:

The Low Pay Commission publishes a report that provides a coverage of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Living Wage (NLW) each year, shortly before the rates are updated in April. The report provides a Local Authority and Regional breakdown of NMW and NLW coverage, including those paid below or within 5p of the applicable rate. Data on those who are within 50p of the rates is not provided as part of the report.

■ Living Wage and Minimum Wage: Norfolk**Ben Goldsborough:** [\[12840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate he has made of the number of workers that will be affected by the increase to the (a) National Minimum Wage and (b) National Living Wage in Norfolk.

Justin Madders:

In total, over 3 million workers are expected to receive a pay rise due to increases to the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage in April 2025.

We will also publish an Impact Assessment alongside the legislation that implements the increase to the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage. The Impact Assessment will provide a regional and country breakdown on the number of workers benefitting from an increase.

■ Products: Labelling**Alex Mayer:** [\[12533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 28 October 2024 to Question 9980 on Products: Labelling, if his Department will make an estimate of the number of items of (a) furniture and (b) other products that have been tested on animals.

Justin Madders:

Animal testing of chemical substances is prohibited in all but a very limited number of circumstances where it is essential for the protection of human and animal health or environmental safety, as prescribed by the REACH Regulation. Therefore, where testing does occur it is in relation to individual chemical substances, which may then be used in the manufacture of another product. As a result, we do not hold information for specific products

■ Trade Agreements: Dispute Resolution**Stephen Gethins:** [\[12968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the UK's commitments under investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms on (a) environmental and (b) human rights protections in partner countries.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK is party to 83 Bilateral Investment Treaties and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership that contain Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).

ISDS provides an independent means to resolve disputes with states where investors believe they have experienced arbitrary, discriminatory or unfair treatment or expropriation without compensation. ISDS does not remove governments' right to regulate in the public interest, including with respect to the environment and human rights.

■ Trade Agreements: USA

Liam Byrne:

[\[12921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to Section 1.3 2. of the UK-US Atlantic Declaration, what progress he has made on (a) enabling the UK and US export controls toolkits to work in a complementary way, (b) implementing export controls related to certain sensitive technologies, (c) targeting end-uses of concern, and (d) tackling the challenge of intangible transfers.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

We are committed to ensuring our export controls develop to address risks to national security and international peace and security posed by emerging technologies, while supporting UK exporters in strategically important sectors.

Building on the commitments in the UK-US Atlantic Declaration, defence trade collaboration between the UK, US, and Australia was announced in August 2024, through the publication of the UK's AUKUS Nations Open General Licence, and the new exemption to the US International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) for the UK. This development recognised the compatibility of our respective export controls systems, lifting key restrictions and allowing our defence firms to work together even more closely.

In line with our commitments in the Atlantic Declaration, the UK is also working closely with our partners on the challenge of intangible transfers and targeting of end-users of concern.

■ Treaties: Colombia

Fabian Hamilton:

[\[12382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the (a) effectiveness of and (b) implications for his policies of recent investor-state dispute settlements under the bilateral investment treaty with Colombia; and whether he plans to retain that treaty.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Government regards the UK-Colombia Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) as playing an important role in the investment relationship between our two countries. The stock of total investment between the UK and Colombia was £6.8 billion in 2023. The BIT contains legally binding investment protection commitments which ensure UK and Colombian investors are treated in line with the rule of law, and are protected against unfair, arbitrary or discriminatory treatment, and expropriation without adequate compensation.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Cabinet Office: Buildings**

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[9832\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many and what proportion of desks were occupied in each of (a) his Department's and (b) Government Equalities Office offices in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available; and how many staff attended each office in person in the same period.

Georgia Gould:

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

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

■ Cabinet Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

John Glen: [\[12415\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Cabinet Office's Government Procurement Card spend over £500 - July 2024, what the purpose was of the payments to (a) the Cookie Jar on 8 July 2024 and (b) Borgo Egnazia 6 on 17 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The payment on 08 July to the Cookie Jar was for the accommodation cost of the former Deputy Prime Minister to attend the launch of the National Risk Register in Northumberland, in August 2023.

The payment made on 17 July 2024 to Borgo Egnazia was accommodation costs for the former Prime Minister's attendance at the G7 summit, which was held on 13-15 June 2024.

■ Cabinet Office: Official Cars

Charlie Dewhirst: [\[13338\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11965 on Cabinet Office: Official Cars, how many senior officials had use of an official car from the Government Car Service on (a) 3 July and (b) 8 November.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government Car Service (GCS) offers vehicles to government departments as a shared resource. Each department independently determines the allocation of these vehicles. For security reasons specific details of car allocations are not issued.

The arrangements relating to the using of vehicles in the Government Car Service is set out in the Civil Service Management Code.

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[13340\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11964 on Cabinet Office: Official Cars, what the security reasons are for not disclosing the number of allocated departmental Government Car Service cars that are electric.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

For security reasons specific details of allocations including make and model of vehicles, or any other information which could identify the vehicle are not issued.

■ Covid-19 Inquiry

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12354\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the cost to the public purse is of the covid-19 inquiry; if he will make an estimate of the anticipated total cost of the inquiry; and whether the inquiry is running to budget.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

It is important that lessons are learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic and the response to it. The UK Covid-19 Inquiry is independent of government and it is right that we allow the Chair to continue her important work. The Chair is under a statutory obligation to avoid unnecessary costs in the Inquiry's work, and she has been clear in her intention to complete her work as quickly and efficiently as possible. Quarterly financial reports are published every quarter on the official UK Covid-19 Inquiry website.

■ Death: Coronavirus

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[12380\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the joint sex and age-at-death distribution was for Covid-19 deaths in 2020 in England that were subject to inquest and have since been registered with ONS for which the interval from date of death to date of registration as a Covid-19 death was (a) one year or less, (b) one to two years and (c) more than two years.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 4th November is attached.

Attachments:

1. UKSA Letter [PQ12380 (1).pdf]

■ Government Departments: Public Expenditure**John Glen:**[\[7759\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he plans to take in response to departments that do not register evaluations on the Government Evaluation Registry by the required deadlines; and whether penalties are imposed for repeated non-compliance.

Georgia Gould:

The Evaluation Task Force undertakes quarterly monitoring and compliance checks to ensure that Departments are registering their planned evaluations on the Government Evaluation Registry.

In any cases where evaluations are not registered, the Evaluation Task Force will seek to resolve the issue with the relevant department or, where necessary, via the Office for Statistics Regulation.

■ Infected Blood Inquiry**Seamus Logan:**[\[12872\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to (a) respond to the recommendations of the Infected Blood Inquiry and (b) involve people affected by infected blood.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

The Government is working closely with DHSC and other relevant departments and organisations to give the recommendations full consideration. We will provide an update to Parliament on the progress we are making to respond to the Inquiry's recommendations by the end of the year, as the Inquiry recommends. The Government will pay compensation to infected and affected victims of infected blood.

The Government asked Sir Robert Francis KC to hold an engagement exercise with the infected blood community to give recommendations on the composition of the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme. The Infected Blood Compensation Authority is committed to engaging with the infected and affected community in an open and transparent way so that it can deliver the compensation scheme as quickly as possible, and in a way that meets the needs of the community.

■ Ministers: Aviation**John Glen:**[\[12387\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he the Government has plans to reduce the use of non-scheduled flights by Ministers.

Georgia Gould:

Ministerial travel is undertaken using efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. Security considerations are also taken into account. Travel plans will always vary and are decided with consideration of the best use of a Minister's time and in the interests of the taxpayer. As was the practice under the previous Government, information

about official overseas ministerial travel will be published as part of the Cabinet Office transparency returns and made available on the GOV.UK website.

■ Trade agreements: USA

Liam Byrne:

[\[12919\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the policy paper entitled The Atlantic Declaration, updated on 21 June 2023, what progress he has made on (a) a shared workplan on critical and emerging technologies, (b) collaborative Research and Development in (i) advanced semiconductor and (ii) other priority technologies, (c) a Critical Minerals Agreement, (d) establishing a US-UK Strategic Technologies Investor Council, (e) establishing a US-UK Data Bridge, (f) a Joint Clean Energy Supply Chain Action Plan and (g) a Civil Nuclear Partnership.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The UK has worked closely with the U.S. to implement commitments across all five pillars of the Atlantic Declaration, which was announced in June 2023. Key achievements include participation in the inaugural Quantum Development Group, launching the inaugural UK-US Joint Committee Meeting on Science and Technology, establishing the UK-U.S. Data Bridge, and setting up the Strategic Technology Investor Council, and establishing the US-UK Joint Standing Committee on Nuclear Energy Cooperation.

The UK looks forward to working with President-elect Trump in office, including on his policy priorities and improving UK-US trading relations to support businesses on both sides of the Atlantic.

Liam Byrne:

[\[12920\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the policy paper entitled The Atlantic Declaration, updated on 21 June 2023, who is the lead (a) minister and (b) official for (i) a shared workplan on critical and emerging technologies, (ii) collaborative Research and Development in (A) advanced semiconductor and (B) other priority technologies, (iii) a Critical Minerals Agreement, (iv) establishing a US-UK Strategic Technologies Investor Council, (v) establishing a US-UK Data Bridge, (vi) a Joint Clean Energy Supply Chain Action Plan and (vii) a Civil Nuclear Partnership.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Cabinet Office's National Security Secretariat is responsible for the overall implementation of the Atlantic Declaration. It operates under the leadership of the National Security Advisor, and Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics. Relevant departments are responsible for specific commitments:

- Critical and emerging technologies (Secretary of State, Department for Business and Trade and Secretary of State Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)

- Economic security and technology protection toolkits and supply chains (Secretary of State Department for Business and Trade and Secretary of State Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)
- Digital transformation (Secretary of State Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)
- Clean Energy (Secretary of State Department for Energy Security and Net Zero)
- Defence, Health Security, and Space (Secretary of State Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Cabinet Office and Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence)

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ BBC: Finance

James McMurdock: [\[12630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing an alternative funding scheme to the BBC licence fee.

James McMurdock: [\[12631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment she has made of the affordability of the BBC licence fee for people on lower incomes; and if she will make an assessment of the potential steps she can take to increase the affordability of the licence fee for those people.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government remains committed to the licence fee for the remainder of the current Charter period.

As part of the next Charter Review, the government will engage with the BBC and others to consider how to ensure the BBC thrives well into the next decade and beyond. This will include discussions on a range of important issues, including future funding models for the BBC and its fairness for licence fee payers.

DEFENCE

■ Air Force: Labour Turnover

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[12784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to improve retention rates in the Royal Air Force.

AI Carns:

As part of a Defence-wide initiative driven at a Ministerial level through the recently established Recruitment and Retention Board, the RAF is taking many steps to address the workforce challenge and retain our personnel.

A People Campaign Plan is underway, with several key initiatives, and the RAF is held to account for progress against this plan by a monthly Ministerial Recruitment and Retention Board.

Retention initiatives include the establishment of working groups to improve the lived experience of our people, increased funding for welfare projects, investment in infrastructure to improve accommodation, and increased opportunities for through-career education and promotion.

We know that when people have a positive lived experience at work, they feel valued and are more likely to want to remain in the organisation. These initiatives will help to ensure that our people feel invested in as talented professionals; they are capable, have a unified sense of purpose, and are provided with the leadership and resources they need to deliver their role to the best of their ability.

■ Armed Forces Covenant

Sarah Hall: [\[13040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his planned timeline is for bringing the Armed Forces Covenant fully into law.

AI Carns:

Our election manifesto committed to “strengthen support for our Armed Forces communities by putting the Armed Forces Covenant fully into law” to help improve their lives across a broad range of areas. We are now developing policy options to take this forward.

■ Armed Forces: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[12750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to reduce instances of post traumatic stress disorder within the armed forces.

AI Carns:

Measures are in place to increase awareness at all levels and to mitigate the development of operational stresses. These include pre-and post-deployment briefing and the availability of support, assessment and (if required) treatment, both during and after deployments. This is available to all personnel, whether Regular or mobilised Reservists. The families of returning personnel are also offered advice on the possible after-effects of an operational deployment.

All Service personnel have access to mental health support throughout their career, including medical and non-medical services. The Trauma Risk Management process (TRiM) is a Tri-Service endorsed strategy for providing support to Armed Forces

personnel involved in a traumatic event, whether on Operations or in any other circumstance. TRiM aims to help individuals use their own coping mechanisms in order to keep them operationally effective, and to identify if further help is needed.

For Armed Forces personnel requiring mental healthcare, including for post-traumatic stress disorder, the DMS provides a responsive, flexible, accessible, and comprehensive treatment service.

■ **Army: Labour Turnover**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[12782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to improve retention rates in the Army.

AI Carns:

Retention is one of the Army's top priorities, supported by Defence. A retention strategy has been launched to address barriers to retention through a wholistic set of financial and policy initiatives spanning the entire employee lifecycle. Supported by a dedicated annual retention fund, the strategy is held to account by the Army Personnel Campaign Board, chaired by Commander Home Command. This is part of a Defence-wide initiative driven at a ministerial level through the recently established Recruitment and Retention Board.

■ **Army: Pay**

James McMurdock: [\[12825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of undertaking a pay review for all military personnel.

AI Carns:

The Armed Forces are served by two independent pay review bodies, the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body, and the Senior Salaries Review Body, who provide recommendations annually on remuneration for all Service personnel.

The Secretary of State for Defence sent a pay round remit letter to the Armed Forces' Pay Review body on 30 of September 2024 requesting their advice to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence on the remuneration and charges for members of the Naval, Military and Air Forces of the Crown for the 2025 Pay Round.

On 29 July 2024, the Government accepted the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body's and Senior Salaries Review Body's recommendations in full for the 2024-25 Pay Round, which was backdated to 1 April 2024 and paid in September salaries.

This was the largest headline percentage uplift in 22 years for the Armed Forces.

■ **AUKUS**

James Cartlidge: [\[12459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the guidance entitled Appointment of AUKUS Adviser and report: Terms of Reference, published on 29 August

2024, whether Sir Stephen Lovegrove reported his findings on AUKUS before the end of October 2024.

James Cartlidge: [\[12460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the guidance entitled Appointment of AUKUS Adviser and report: Terms of Reference, published on 29 August 2024, when he plans to publish Sir Stephen Lovegrove's report on AUKUS.

Maria Eagle:

An extension has been provided to allow Sir Stephen Lovegrove to gather all the necessary information. He will now report to the Prime Minister, Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor in November 2024.

■ Defence: Expenditure

Helen Maguire: [\[12619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if his Department will make an estimate of planned defence spending in the next two years as a share of GDP using NATO's definition of defence expenditure.

Maria Eagle:

Based on the OBR's latest GDP projections, defence spending is currently expected to be 2.29% of GDP in financial year (FY) 2024-25 and 2.30% in 2025-26. Future FYs' figures are subject to the outcome of the second phase of the Spending Review.

■ Defence: Procurement

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[12600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he takes to ensure joint defence projects are compatible with the UK's (a) arms export control system and (b) international obligations.

Maria Eagle:

The UK takes its export control responsibilities very seriously and we operate one of the most robust and transparent export control regimes in the world. We rigorously assess export licence applications in support of joint defence projects against strict assessment criteria, the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (SELC). We are satisfied that these Criteria continue to provide a thorough forward-looking risk assessment process for all export licence applications. We remain able to amend, suspend or revoke extant licences as circumstances require.

■ F-35 Aircraft: Procurement

Patricia Ferguson: [\[12578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he takes to trace the end user of UK components delivered to the F-35 programme.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[12599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he takes to trace the end-user of UK components delivered to the F-35 programme.

Maria Eagle:

The F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office, part of the US Department of Defence, manages the F-35 programme for all F-35 Partner Nations through its global industry supply chain.

Patricia Ferguson: [\[12580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he takes to ensure UK components supplied to the F-35 programme can be subjected to (a) a product recall and (b) an air accident investigation process .

Maria Eagle:

If there is a need for a product recall this will be managed by the F-35 Joint Program Office (JPO) through its global industry supply chain.

Air accident investigation is undertaken by the F-35 Partner Nation that has experienced the accident. They will be supported by the JPO and any findings impacting air safety will be shared with all Partner Nations.

■ Military Decorations

Angus MacDonald: [\[12645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if his Department will introduce a medal for (a) seriously injured and (b) medically retired service personnel.

Al Carns:

Service personnel who are injured and evacuated from a medal earning operational deployment are awarded the relevant Campaign, Operational, or General Service medal regardless of whether or not they have served the required number of days for the medal.

While, at this time, the Ministry of Defence has no plans to recommend the introduction of a new medal for Service personnel who are seriously injured or medically discharged from Service for non-operational reasons, there is always the opportunity to look into this.

It is important to note that the Department cannot unilaterally introduce such a medal since this would require the agreement of the cross-Government Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals, and ultimately The Sovereign.

■ Ministry of Defence: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[13144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 28 October 2024 to Question 9611 on Ministry of Defence: Buildings, how many individual desks were

occupied in his Department's HQ office in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available.

AI Carns:

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

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

■ **Ministry of Defence: Data Processing**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[12791]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to help increase productivity within his Department through the use of (a) artificial intelligence and (b) effective use of data.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence is committed to improving its productivity and is establishing a central Productivity Portfolio to break down the barriers to productive working, and is actively investigating opportunities to drive productivity through the use of AI and the effective use of data while rigorously managing the risk of using these capabilities to support human analysis and decision making. This includes using informational chatbots, machine learning applications and generative AI to automate and accelerate routine business operations and policy work; through to Defence-specific opportunities driven by data to enhance the speed of decision-making, optimise logistics or increase the availability of military capabilities.

We draw on a range of resources, published on GOV.UK, to inform our AI and data usage. For example, the Generative AI Framework, the Data Maturity Assessment, the Ethics, Transparency and Accountability Framework, and the Data Ethics Framework. The Department also has access to the Central Digital & Data Office, based in the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, for expert advice.

We will continue to regularly review our usage of AI and data to maximise productivity benefits for staff and the public.

■ **Ministry of Defence: Labour Turnover**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[12786]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to improve retention rates in his Department.

AI Carns:

The Ministry of Defence understands the importance of creating a positive working environment where all employees feel valued, included and motivated to contribute to the purpose of the Department. We have a stable turnover rate, and we are actively monitoring retention, particularly for key skill areas. We gain understanding of the lived experience of our staff through the People Survey and through Exit Surveys,

and these have evidenced that our staff are committed to their work and our organisation. Where these surveys have identified areas for improvement, we have responded with a clear focus on the things that matter to our staff, actively promoting professional and leadership development, “our offer” of working in Defence as well as modernising our reward offer for a better employee experience.

■ **Ministry of Defence: Procurement**

James McMurdock:

[\[12636\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to increase value for money in procurement.

Maria Eagle:

Through the Strategic Defence Review we will reform our approach to procurement to deliver defence capabilities at greater pace, leverage rapidly changing technology, and take a One Defence approach to our requirements to secure the best possible value for money.

We will bring forward a Defence Industrial Strategy that aligns our security and economic priorities, and deliver a lean, end-to-end integrated acquisition system that gets more defence output for every defence pound spent.

■ **Navy: Labour Turnover**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési:

[\[12783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to improve retention rates in the Royal Navy.

Al Carns:

The Royal Navy (RN) continues to meet its operational commitments, but tackling recruitment and retention challenges is a top priority.

As part of a Defence-wide initiative driven at Ministerial level through the recently established Recruitment Retention Board, the RN has established a high-level Retention Steering Group to coordinate all retention activity, analyse outflow data and ensure that quicker action is taken to counter outflow trends. In support, the RN has generated a revised Retention Communications Plan, based on the results from Continuous Assessment Surveys, to demonstrate how it is reacting to workforce feedback.

Areas such as improving earlier years career management for Officers and Ratings are being prioritised to address outflow peaks at three and six years length of service. In parallel, enhancing the lived experience for deployed personnel through improved health and wellbeing support, along with reviewing how our workforce is deployed in support of operational output to provide greater stability and reduce uncertainty, are also key initiatives.

■ Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Labour Turnover

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese:

[\[12785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to improve retention rates in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

AI Carns:

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) are highly valued, specialist personnel. We are committed to listening to their concerns and keeping a continued dialogue to address the issues they have raised. Recruitment and retention of staff remains a priority for the RFA and is part of the Defence-wide initiative driven at Ministerial level through the recently established Recruitment and Retention Board. Work is ongoing to address the ongoing pay dispute raised by Maritime Trade Unions and to improve RFA terms and conditions of employment.

Work is focussed on addressing issues in the short term, while also generating meaningful improvements to the RFA "offer" overall, to ensure it remains competitive in the long term. There are a number of initiatives in support of this which include updating working practices - such as part-time, flexible, and family-friendly arrangements - modernising allowances and pay, and shortening the timescales of recruitment.

■ Veterans: Essex

James McMurdock:

[\[12834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to support homeless military veterans in Essex.

AI Carns:

This is a Government of service that will always stand up for those who serve our country. I am working across Government to ensure veterans throughout the UK have access to the support they need on housing, as well as health, employment and other areas.

To achieve this the Government has committed a further £3.5 million to the Reducing Veteran Homelessness Programme, including Op FORTITUDE, the homelessness pathway for veterans. As of 10 November 2024, Op FORTITUDE has taken over 2,700 referrals and supported over 800 veterans into housing.

This new funding announcement follows the Prime Minister's commitment earlier in the year that veterans living in England will be exempt from local connection and residency tests when applying for social housing. I recently attended a roundtable with veteran housing organisations to discuss the implementation of this reform, and I am also a member of the Inter-ministerial Group on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping which is driving progress on the development of our cross-government homelessness strategy.

James McMurdock:

[\[12842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people have (a) applied for and (b) received a Veterans' ID Card in (a) South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency and (b) Essex.

AI Carns:

From December 2018, all Service leavers are automatically issued a Veterans Card on discharge (Phase 1). For those who left service prior to then, applications must be submitted (Phase 2).

The below table details the number of veterans cards issued as of October 2024; the latest data available.

AREA	PHASE 1 - ISSUED	PHASE 2 - APPLIED	PHASE 2 - ISSUED
South Basildon and East Thurrock	108	350	347
Essex	1340	3535	3479

■ Veterans: Pensions

Andrew Bowie:

[\[12947\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when members of the Immediate Choice veterans cohort will receive their McCloud remedy pension payments.

AI Carns:

When an Immediate Choice member opts for alternative benefits under the 2015 Pension Remedy (McCloud), arrears and interest are included in the calculations. However, due to the intricacy of these calculations and the high number of elections, the completion of these payments is taking longer than anticipated.

We are processing all elections in the order they were received. If an election was made before 1 September 2024, it may take up to six months to adjust the pension entitlement. For elections received after 1 September 2024, the estimated revision time is up to four months. Members are informed about this delay upon returning their election form.

Members who have chosen alternative benefits will continue to receive their current benefits until their election is processed. These alternative benefits will be retroactively applied from the date of original entitlement, with interest applied from that date until the payment date, ensuring members do not experience any financial disadvantage.

EDUCATION**■ Children in Care: Young Offenders****James McMurdock:****[12635]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps her Department has taken to provide rehabilitation support to children who have lived in care who are (a) in police custody and (b) serving custodial sentences.

Janet Daby:

The latest data for the year ending March 2023 shows that 2% of children in care aged 10 to 17 were convicted or subject to youth cautions or youth conditional cautions during the year, down from 3% in 2019. This compares to 1% of all children aged 10 to 17 in the general population. Latest data also shows that 3% of care leavers were in custody, which is the same as in 2019. Surveys estimate that around 25% of the adult prison population was in care at some point during their childhoods.

In 2019, the department, along with the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, published a joint national protocol on reducing the criminalisation of children in care, which can be accessed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765082/The_national_protocol_on_reducing_unnecessary_criminalisation_of_looked-after_children_and_care.pdf. The protocol is designed to prevent unnecessarily criminalising already highly vulnerable children and young people where possible. It sets out best practice for avoiding the criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers up to the age of 25.

Furthermore, NHS England commission liaison and diversion services in custody suites across all English police forces to identify people of all ages who have mental health issues, learning disabilities, substance misuse or other vulnerabilities when they first come into contact with the criminal justice system. These services then support these individuals to access appropriate health and social care services.

In police custody, appropriate adults play an important role in safeguarding the rights, entitlements and welfare of detained children. This includes providing support, advice and assistance to the detainee, observing whether the police are acting properly and fairly, assisting detained children when communicating with the police and helping them to understand their rights and ensuring that those rights are respected and protected.

In the Youth Custody Service, all children in custody are supported via the evidence-based Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS) and Constructive Resettlement.

The evidence-based Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS) introduced trauma-informed ways of working that emphasise the importance of positive relationships between staff and children as a way of supporting their care, wellbeing and potential for change.

Constructive Resettlement complements the Framework for Integrated Care (SECURE STAIRS) by providing personalised support, such as by recognising the effects of traumatic experiences on the child, to underpin the structural support provided, for instance, through the provision of a place to live. Staff also support effective resettlement in the community by taking a strengths-based approach and acknowledging that the child may need a variety of support and interventions to keep them and other people safe and enable them to successfully integrate in their communities.

■ Equality: Curriculum

Alex Mayer:

[\[12528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to add education on diversity to school curriculums.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE. The terms of reference were published in July and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review>.

The review will seek to deliver a curriculum which is rich and broad, that reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented. The review will seek to identify and focus on addressing the most significant and pressing issues facing curriculum and assessment without destabilising the system.

The review group will publish an interim report early in 2025, setting out their interim findings and confirming the key areas for further work. The final review with recommendations will be published in autumn 2025.

The government intends to legislate so that, following the review and the implementation of reforms, academies will be required to teach the new national curriculum, alongside other state-funded schools. This will give parents certainty over their children's education.

■ Further Education: Special Educational Needs

Dan Tomlinson:

[\[12672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will create alternative qualification pathways for students with Education, Health and Care Plans to support their access to further education.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government is committed to ensuring that all young people, including those with education, health and care plans, can access a range of high quality qualifications and programmes which support them to develop the skills they need to thrive at work and throughout life. This is at the heart of the government's missions to break down the barriers to opportunity and to boost economic growth.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review will ensure meaningful, rigorous and high value pathways for all, with access to qualifications and training that will provide the skills they need to seize opportunity. The review will look closely at the key challenges to attainment for young people and the barriers which hold children back from the opportunities and life chances they deserve, in particular children and young people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or with special educational needs or disabilities.

■ Lifelong Education

Damian Hinds:

[\[12064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to paragraph 4.10 of the Autumn Budget 2024, for what reason the launch date of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement has been revised.

Janet Daby:

The government is committed to delivering the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), expanding access to high quality, flexible education and training for adults throughout their working lives, helping businesses to fill skills gaps and kickstart economic growth.

The LLE will now launch in the 2026/27 academic year for learners studying courses starting on or after 1 January 2027, including full courses, modules and Higher Technical Qualifications.

This is in order to:

- Improve the impact and effectiveness of the LLE by ensuring that policy and design fully align with this government's ambitious vision for the future of our skills landscape.
- Refine the department's delivery and implementation plans through collaboration with Skills England to help support this government's industrial strategy.
- Give education providers the necessary time to prepare for the launch of this new and transformational student-finance system.

■ Schools: Knives

James McMurdock:

[\[12821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on tackling knife crime in schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

Keeping children safe is a top priority for this government. The department works closely with the Home Office to deliver better and safer outcomes for young people through the Opportunity and Safer Streets Missions. For example, the department is working cross-government to deliver on the government's manifesto commitments on the Young Futures Programme, to establish Prevention Partnerships and Young Futures Hubs.

Education plays a key role in ensuring children can lead safe and fulfilling lives, and it provides opportunities to educate young people on dangerous behaviour and provide preventative support to those most vulnerable.

Relationships, sex and health education includes content on the situations that can lead young people to carry weapons such as knives, including criminal exploitation through involvement in gangs and county lines drugs operations, and in particular the grooming relationships that can accompany this. Issues around gun and knife crime can also be taught as part of a school's wider curriculum.

School-led Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed taskforces have been established in ten hotspot areas in England. The taskforces are investing in and delivering evidence-based interventions to help young people get back on track with their education and reduce their vulnerability to serious violence. The department's Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces see teams of specialists providing integrated, child-centred support in the largest alternative provision schools in serious violence hotspot areas.

■ Schools: Transport

Dame Harriett Baldwin: [\[12410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what reforms she is considering to the eligibility rules for free school transport.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer the hon. Member for West Worcestershire to the answer of 4 November 2024 to Question [901015](#).

Alex Mayer: [\[12532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding his Department made available for school transport for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in academic years (a) 2020-21, (b) 2021-22, (c) 2022-23, (d) 2023-24 and (e) 2024-25.

Catherine McKinnell:

Most central government funding for home to school travel is provided through the local government finance settlement (LGFS), which is administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This funding is non-ringfenced, giving local authorities the flexibility to make the best decisions for their local area. In total, the LGFS for the 2024/25 financial year makes available up to £64.7 billion for local authorities in England. Further details on the settlement can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/final-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2024-to-2025>.

■ Special Educational Needs: Finance

Alex Easton: [\[12849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure local authorities have equal access to funding for special educational needs and disabilities services.

Catherine McKinnell:

Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or in alternative provision receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life.

The department is providing an increase of almost £1 billion for English local authorities' high needs budgets in the 2025/26 financial year, bringing total high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND in England to £11.9 billion.

The department is now in the process of calculating indicative high needs funding allocations for local authorities next year through the national funding formula (NFF), which we expect to publish by the end of November.

■ Special Educational Needs: Lincolnshire**Sir John Hayes:**[\[12364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support early speech and language interventions in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire.

Stephen Morgan:

The department's vision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), is the same as it is for all children and young people. We want them to receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life.

The department is funding support for 11,100 schools registered for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme. The majority of these are schools with the highest levels of disadvantage, as defined by the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. As of January 2024, we estimate over 211,000 reception age children so far have received this extra support.

In partnership with NHS England, we are funding the Early Language and Support for Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinder programme, to trial new ways of working to earlier identify and support children with SLCN in early years and primary schools, utilising Therapy Support Assistants and a variation of identification tools across the pathfinders.

In further partnership with NHS England and the Department for Health and Social Care, this department is funding the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme. PINS will build teacher and staff capacity to identify and meet the needs of neurodiverse children, including those with SLCN, through whole school interventions.

The department funds a range of materials, to which all local areas are signposted, hosted on the Nasen website. This website is an online portal offering education professionals free, easy access to high quality information, resources and training for meeting the needs of children with SEND. It can be accessed here:

<https://www.wholeschoosend.org.uk/page/universal-send-services>. We have funded the creation of a suite of condition specific videos to provide helpful pointers, techniques and advice on inclusive teaching strategies, which includes materials for schools to use for children and young people with SLCN. These videos can be accessed at: <https://www.sendgateway.org.uk/resources?title=condition-specific>. We also offer free training on speech language and communication, which is available here: <https://www.wholeschoosend.org.uk/page/online-cpd-units>.

The department will consider how best to use learnings and insights from these programmes to improve support for children with SLCNs, including consistency of support provided across different geographies.

■ Special Educational Needs: Northumberland

Joe Morris:

[12591]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many children requiring SEND support did not attend school in each council ward in Northumberland in each of the last five academic years.

Stephen Morgan:

The requested information is not held centrally.

The department collects information on children who are electively home educated (EHE) from local authorities on a voluntary basis. The latest figures can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education>.

The department also collects data on children missing education (CME) from local authorities on a voluntary basis. These are children of compulsory school age not registered at school or otherwise receiving suitable education. The latest figures can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-missing-education>.

Information on the number of children in EHE in Northumberland between 2021/22 and 2022/23 is available in the following table: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/d158d673-76e2-4aab-a0f2-08dcfae39e23>. Information on the number of CME in Northumberland between 2021/22 and 2022/23 is available in the following table: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/d86675e8-9537-4727-a0ed-08dcfae39e23>. As data was collected from local authorities for the first time in autumn 2022, information is not held for prior time periods. Additionally, EHE and CME data is not available at council ward level.

In autumn 2023/24, 15% of all EHE children had an additional requirement of special educational needs (SEN) support and 8% of all CME had an additional requirement

of SEN support. This compares with 13% for the overall school population in January 2023.

The Children's Wellbeing Bill will legislate for local authority registers of children not in school. This will include a duty on parents to provide the necessary information for these registers if their child is eligible. These proposals are intended to help local authorities identify all children not in school in their areas, including those that may require SEN support, so they can ensure children are receiving a safe and suitable education.

■ **Teachers: Pensions**

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[12542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps has her Department is taking with the Teacher's Pension Scheme to reduce the time taken to provide pension valuations for teachers undergoing divorce proceedings.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department is aware of a backlog with the number of outstanding Cash Equivalent Transfer Value figures that are used by members in divorce proceedings. The backlog has arisen as a result of the Transitional Protection (McCloud) remedy and the need for complex guidance to be provided before affected cases could be processed by the scheme administrator.

The scheme administrator has undertaken IT development to help expedite these cases in order to increase capacity. Discussions are ongoing regarding any additional efficiencies and resource that can be used, as the department appreciates the impact that a delay has on members in these circumstances.

■ **Universities: China**

James McMurdock:

[\[12628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential implications for national security of the proportion of funding for universities from China.

Janet Daby:

The United Kingdom welcomes international partnerships and students, including from China, who make a very positive impact on the UK's higher education (HE) sector, our economy and society as a whole. However, we will always protect our national security interests, human rights and values.

As a matter of longstanding policy, the department does not comment on the detail of national security assessments. The department recognises the potential for overseas interference in our HE sector. We are committed to ensuring ways to increase transparency and improve HE providers' overall resilience and economic security, whilst respecting the autonomy of universities.

A key element of the government's International Education Strategy is diversification. Universities must ensure they have appropriate processes in place to manage risks associated with dependence on a single source of funding, whether that is from a single organisation or a single country. The Office for Students is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the financial sustainability of HE providers in England to ensure they have an up to date understanding of the sustainability of the sector.

The government is carrying out an audit of the UK's relationship with China as a bilateral and global actor, to improve our ability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Carbon Emissions: National Grid

Tim Roca:

[\[901229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of decarbonising the grid by 2030 on job creation in Macclesfield constituency.

Michael Shanks:

Through our clean power mission, including through investments made by Great British Energy, and the National Wealth Fund, we will work with industry to deliver the jobs and investment required to achieve our clean power 2030 ambition.

Whilst we are still deciding where investments will be made, we expect that good jobs will be available across the country as we see a rapid expansion in the renewable workforce by 2030.

■ Energy: Prices

Frank McNally:

[\[901233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to reduce energy costs for domestic consumers.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government is committed to ensuring energy bills are affordable for all consumers – that's why we are running to deliver our clean power by 2030 mission. And whilst we make this transition, we will do everything we can to support households we know are finding it tough.

We will continue to deliver the Warm Home Discount which provides a £150 rebate off energy bills to 3.3 million eligible low-income households.

We are working with energy suppliers to ensure that they provide additional support to households that are struggling to pay their energy bills.

Jas Athwal:

[\[901237\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of lifting the onshore wind ban on energy prices.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is committed to radically scaling up deployment of technologies such as onshore wind, as demonstrated by our lifting of the planning ban earlier this year.

A clean power system will protect consumers from global gas prices and fluctuations which, as a result of the failure of the party opposite, drove increases of over £1,300 in the electricity price cap for a typical household during the winter of 2022 / 2023.

■ Mineworkers' Pension Scheme

Jo White:

[\[12551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many people are in receipt of the Mineworkers Pension Scheme in each constituency.

Sarah Jones:

Every constituency in the country has at least one person in receipt of the Mineworkers Pension Scheme. The number of scheme members in each constituency is listed in the table below. This information is from the scheme trustees and correct as at 30 October 2024. Some of these scheme members will not yet be in receipt of their pension, but we do not have a breakdown of that information at constituency level.

Attachments:

1. Number of pension scheme members by constituency [PQW202417798.pdf]

Dave Robertson:

[\[901232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes to the Mineworkers Pension Scheme on the living standards of the recipients of that pension.

Sarah Jones:

I am proud that we have finally ended the injustice of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme. Miners across the country powered our economy for decades, working in the toughest environments. They should not have had to fight so long for a fair pension. The party opposite had 14 years to end this injustice but did nothing. Within 4 months we have ended the scandal. That's the difference a Labour government makes.

■ Nuclear Power: Regulation

Tony Vaughan:

[\[901230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the regulatory framework for approving nuclear projects.

Kerry McCarthy:

The UK has an enabling and rigorous energy regulatory regime. The Government is taking steps to reform the planning process and will continue to work with the regulators to understand additional opportunities to streamline the regulation of new nuclear projects.

Oil and Natural Gas: Licensing**Andrew Bowie:**[\[12466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate his Department has made of the number of pending (a) oil and (b) gas licence applications delayed due to the judgement in UKSC 2022/0064.

Michael Shanks:

The Government does not expect the Finch judgement to delay licence applications because it relates to Environmental Impact Assessments associated with applications for development consent for offshore oil and gas projects that have already secured a licence.

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 has paused considering any further licences from the 33rd round pending the finalisation of the Government's consultation process into the future of licensing.

Andrew Bowie:[\[12467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many (a) oil and (b) gas licence applications made under the 33rd licensing round are yet to be determined.

Andrew Bowie:[\[12468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when his Department expects the North Sea Transition Authority to publish decisions on the remaining (a) oil and (b) gas licence applications made under the 33rd licensing round.

Michael Shanks:

The North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) has paused considering any further licences from the 33rd round pending the finalisation of the Government's consultation process into the future of licensing.

Solar Power and Wind Power: British Overseas Territories**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[12404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what support his Department provides for (a) wind and (b) solar power in the Overseas Territories.

Michael Shanks:

The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) leads the relationship with the Overseas Territories, and any work this Department has conducted in this area has been done via FCDO.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS■ **Animal Welfare****Ian Byrne:**[\[13013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the government is taking to improve animal welfare.

Daniel Zeichner:

This Government was elected on a mandate to introduce the most ambitious plans to improve animal welfare in a generation. That is exactly what we will do, and we will be outlining more detail in due course.

■ **Animal Welfare: Finance****Dr Luke Evans:**[\[13010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his planned timetable is for setting out further grants through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway.

Daniel Zeichner:

We are looking carefully at how to position further investment including grants as part of the Spending Review process. Eligible cattle, sheep and pig farmers can still apply for a funded vet visit to improve their animals' health and welfare.

■ **Animal Welfare: Fines****Stuart Anderson:**[\[12104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of animal welfare penalty notices.

Daniel Zeichner:

The first annual report from enforcement authorities on penalty notices issued is to be submitted to Defra by June 2025 and a consolidated report will subsequently be published.

■ **Bottles: Deposit Return Schemes****Ruth Cadbury:**[\[12736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department have taken to introduce a Deposit Return Scheme for plastic bottles.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to delivering the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers in October 2027, as agreed with the devolved governments of the UK, and in accordance with the Joint Policy Statement published in April 2024. We plan to lay the DRS regulations for England/Northern Ireland before Parliament in late 2024 and for them to come into force in early 2025 (assuming parliamentary time allows) and for the Deposit Management Organisation, who will run the scheme, to be appointed in April 2025 as planned.

Farms: Costs**James McMurdock:**[\[13137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he plans to take to support family-owned farms with rising business costs.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra's farming budget will be £2.4 billion in 2025/26. This will include the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history: £1.8 billion for Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes. This funding will deliver improvements to food security, biodiversity, carbon emissions, water quality, air quality and flood resilience.

ELM schemes will remain at the centre of our offer for family-owned farms and other farmers, with the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery all continuing. These offer funding streams for farmers to make their businesses more sustainable and resilient, including those who have been often ignored such as small, grassland, upland and tenant farmers. We will work with the sector to continue to roll out, improve and evolve these schemes, to make them work for farming and nature.

This support forms part of the Government's New Deal for Farmers. The Government is also supporting family-owned farms and other farmers by protecting them from being undercut by low welfare and low standards in trade deals, by lowering energy bills for farmers by switching on GB Energy, and by using the Government's own purchasing power to back British produce so that 50% of food brought in hospitals, army bases and prisons is locally produced or certified to high environmental standards.

Fisheries: Quotas**Rupert Lowe:**[\[13054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the (a) UK's initial demand for total allowable catch and (b) agreed outcome was for quotas for each species in its negotiations with the EU on fish quotas in each year since 2021.

Daniel Zeichner:

Due to the nature of the negotiations, it is not appropriate to publicly disclose negotiating documents detailing the UK's opening positions.

The Written Records detailing the outcome of the UK's annual fisheries negotiations with the EU are published on GOV.UK.

Furthermore, Defra has published reports on the 'economic outcome of negotiations for UK fishing opportunities' on GOV.UK since 2021. These include annexes with the UK quota for each stock.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[13109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) limiting and (b) banning commercial trading of fishing licence quotas.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is not planning any assessment on commercial trading of fishing licence quotas. Quota trading helps our fishing industry by allowing quota to flow to those who most need it. This helps maximise uptake and mitigate choke risks. It also provides important flexibilities for British businesses. For example, it allows fishermen to sell quotas when adverse weather, vessel failure or other problems mean quotas would otherwise go unused.

■ Fisheries: Territorial Waters

Rupert Lowe:

[\[13105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing legislation to require that all fish caught in (a) UK territorial waters and (b) the UK exclusive economic zone are (i) landed and (ii) processed in the UK.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is not considering the introduction of legislation that would require all fish caught within UK waters to be landed and processed in the UK. British fishing boats currently have the flexibility to land their fish into ports and markets which offer the best facilities and prices. They must also meet the economic link licence condition which ensures their activities provide a genuine economic benefit to the UK. It is not this Government's intention to limit vessel owners from making these business decisions in their best interest.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[13107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing (a) provenance and (b) tax tests to prevent vessels with foreign owners from flying a UK flag of convenience when commercial fishing in UK waters.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is not considering the introduction of provenance and tax tests on owners of British fishing boats. These vessels are already required to provide genuine economic benefits to the UK through the economic link licence conditions.

■ Livestock: Animal Housing**Dr Luke Evans:** [\[13011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway in encouraging cage free systems of farming.

Daniel Zeichner:

We are firmly committed to maintaining and improving animal welfare and want to work closely with the farming sector to deliver high standards. The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway has made grants available to improve the health and welfare of livestock. The grants have been codesigned with farmers, academics, vets and industry representatives. We continue to work with the industry on how the Pathway can encourage cage free systems of farming.

■ Packaging: Recycling**Gareth Snell:** [\[12721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to provide regular information to businesses on how revenues raised through the extended producer responsibility scheme are spent by local authorities.

Mary Creagh:

The packaging Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme will be run by the Scheme Administrator. Revenues will only fund efficient and effective local authority services. The Scheme Administrator will regularly publish information relating to its assessment of efficiency and effectiveness across the four nations once the scheme is up and running and offer support to local authorities to ensure their waste management services are efficient and effective.

■ Per- and Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances**Ian Byrne:** [\[13032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that concentrations of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are within the guideline levels set by the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

Emma Hardy:

The Drinking Water Inspectorate's (DWI) current guideline limit on individual types of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) of 100 nanograms per litre for treated drinking water was set in 2021 based on an assessment of existing scientific knowledge. These limits were agreed with the UK Health Security Agency to be robust levels with an appropriate margin to ensure our drinking water is not a danger to human health.

Work continues across the Government to help us assess levels of PFAS occurring in the environment, their sources, and potential risks to inform policy and regulatory approaches.

In July we also announced a rapid review of the Environmental Improvement Plan to deliver on our legally binding targets to save nature. This includes how best to manage chemicals, including the risks posed by PFAS.

■ **Plastics**

Ruth Jones: [\[13000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support businesses to transition away from plastic.

Mary Creagh:

Stakeholder engagement continues to be at the core of our packaging reforms, and we continue to engage with all sectors in bringing this policy into place. Additionally, Defra has updated guidance on all single-use plastic regulations to improve clarity on single-use plastic bans and restrictions.

Defra continues to engage with and support industry through the UK Plastics Pact to tackle plastic waste and pollution. The pact's membership represents two-thirds of all consumer packaging in the UK. Members have reduced their problematic and unnecessary plastic items by 84% since 2018.

■ **Plastics: Waste**

Ruth Jones: [\[12998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to publish a schedule of plastic bans.

Mary Creagh:

The Government is currently considering the actions that can be taken to address the challenges associated with single-use plastic products and is committed to moving to a circular economy. As a part of this transition, managing and reducing plastic waste and following the principles of the waste hierarchy: reduce, reuse, recycle, will be crucial.

■ **Slaughterhouses: Animal Welfare**

Ian Byrne: [\[13030\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that abattoirs adhere to animal welfare requirements.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) monitors and enforces animal welfare legislation in abattoirs on behalf of Defra. Legislation sets out strict requirements to protect the welfare of animals when slaughtered and Official Veterinarians of the FSA are present in all approved slaughterhouses to monitor and enforce animal welfare requirements. The FSA has a zero-tolerance policy to animal welfare breaches and will take appropriate action where these occur.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Abduction: Children**

Rachel Gilmour: [\[12877\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will meet with the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead to discuss a case of international child abduction.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Government takes International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) very seriously. When a British child has been abducted, the FCDO's consular staff provide empathetic and practical support to those affected, including to signpost them to relevant partner organisations. The FCDO has also published guidance to assist parents affected by IPCA. FCDO Consular staff will contact the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead for more details of the case, to offer relevant advice.

■ Arab States: Human Rights

Andy Slaughter: [\[12411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterparts in (a) Kuwait, (b) Qatar and (c) Bahrain on their obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and what steps he is taking to support participative democracy in those countries.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

His Majesty's Government continues to engage across a range of human rights priorities with Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. We remain committed to the promotion of universal freedoms and upholding human rights globally and encourage all countries to meet their international and domestic human rights commitments.

■ Asylum: British Indian Ocean Territory

Priti Patel: [\[12055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many asylum seekers in the British Indian Ocean Territory have received medical treatment in the last three years; in what countries that treatment was provided; and at what cost.

Stephen Doughty:

The FCDO provides funding to the BIOT Administration for the good governance of the Territory, which includes the costs of supporting the migrants there, whose welfare and safety is paramount, as well as their rights to patient confidentiality. They have access to 24/7 medical care from a team of doctors, paramedics, registered nurses and mental health practitioners, contracted by the BIOT Administration. Where treatment cannot be provided in the BIOT, urgent medical transfers organised or specialists can be brought to the island. Given the broad range of medical services

provided in a number of different locations over a three-year period, the detailed information requested cannot be provided except at a disproportionate cost.

■ **China: Trade Agreements**

Sarah Hall:

[\[13159\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he had with his Chinese counterpart on trade deals during his visit to China in October 2024.

Catherine West:

The Secretary of State held wide-ranging talks with his counterpart during his visit to China in October 2024, covering the breadth of the UK-China bilateral relationship. He discussed the promotion of secure and resilient growth through increased trade and investment with China, which creates jobs, drives innovation, boosts productivity and provides economic stability and certainty for the UK economy.

■ **Diego Garcia: Migrants**

Nick Timothy:

[\[12548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions the Government has had with the Government of Mauritius in relation to Sri Lankan nationals located on Diego Garcia.

Stephen Doughty:

The Government discussed a wide range of issues with Mauritius during the negotiations over the exercise of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including the migrant situation on Diego Garcia. The agreement reached between the UK and Mauritius on 3 October will shut down any possibility of the Indian Ocean being used as a dangerous illegal migration route to the UK, with Mauritius taking responsibility for any future arrivals once the treaty underpinning the agreement enters into force. Any further arrivals before the treaty comes into force will be handled in line with the recent agreement with St Helena.

■ **Gaza: Air Force**

Richard Burgon:

[\[12720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6280 on Gaza: Air Force, whether his Department used information from the Ministry of Defence on unarmed UK surveillance aircraft operations when making its International Humanitarian Law assessment on Israel, published on 2 September 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are unable to comment on the detail of intelligence matters, for operational security reasons. The government is clear on the fundamental importance of the international rule of law. The UK's robust export licensing criteria states that the Government will not issue export licences if there is a clear risk that the items might

be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Following our review into Israel's compliance with IHL in Gaza, this Government concluded that a clear risk does exist, and we have suspended export licences for such items that could be used in the current conflict in Gaza.

■ **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

Paula Barker: [\[12220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on allowing medical aid into Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is intolerable, and we remain deeply concerned by the impact of the conflict on access to medical facilities and healthcare. We are clear that Israel can and must do more to get aid into Gaza. The Prime Minister stressed this in a call with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on 19 October; the Foreign Secretary reiterated this in his call with Foreign Minister Katz on 27 October. The UK is committed to alleviating the suffering in Gaza and we provide significant funding to partners, including support to UK-Med to run field hospitals in Gaza. On 17 October we announced the UK will match up to £10 million of public donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee's Middle East humanitarian appeal.

■ **Government Hospitality: Wines**

Emily Thornberry: [\[12922\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of Wednesday 6 November to Questions 12253, 12254, 12255 and 12256 on Government Hospitality: Wines and Government Hospitality: Spirits, who the attendees were of the December 2023 Minister-led event to mark the centenary of the Government Wine Cellar.

Catherine West:

Pursuant to the answer to questions 12253, 12254, 12255 and 12256 attendees at the December 23 Centenary event were the Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, Minister responsible for the Government Wine Cellar at that time, Chairs and Members of the Government Wine Committee, past and present, their guests and two officials.

■ **Israel: F-35 Aircraft**

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[12598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with F-35 programme partners on the risk of components supplied to Israel being used to commit violations of international law.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

On day one in office, the Foreign Secretary commissioned a thorough review into Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), given the grave

concerns about the conduct and consequences of the war in Gaza for civilians. The UK's robust export licensing criteria states that the Government will not issue export licences if there is a *clear risk* that the items might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL. Given the conclusions of the review, on 2 September the Government suspended around 30 export licences to Israel, effectively covering all arms exports for use in the current conflict in Gaza, exempting components for F-35 aircraft which, for reasons outlined in the Foreign Secretary's Statement and the Business and Trade Secretary's Written Ministerial Statement, have been excluded from the suspension.

■ **Mauritius: Telecommunications**

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[12356\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to Huawei's press article entitled, *Safe Mauritius, the Inspiration for Heaven*, published in October 2018, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the security provisions within Mauritius' telecommunications system; and if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of those provisions on the use of the telecommunications system by his Department's officials.

Anneliese Dodds:

As previously referenced in the Answer to 10968, this is the subject of an ongoing police investigation in Mauritius, and we are unable to provide further comment. We continue to monitor the situation.

■ **North Korea: Diplomatic Relations**

Alicia Kearns:

[\[11304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has demarched the North Korean chargee over North Korean troops in Russia and Ukraine.

Catherine West:

The DPRK Charge d'Affairs was called in on 29 October to express our concern about DPRK's support for Russia. We condemn the increasing military cooperation between the DPRK and Russia in the strongest possible terms. We are gravely concerned about the deployment of DPRK troops to Russia, and the reports of DPRK and Ukraine engaged in combat. This demonstrates Russia's growing reliance upon third country support at a time when their casualties are at their highest level. We are working with our partners on a coordinated response, and have made clear to the DPRK that this action is dangerous and has serious consequences for peace and security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

■ Pakistan: Blasphemy**Ruth Jones:**[\[13005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Pakistani counterpart on reversing anti-blasphemy legislation.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Pakistan is a FCDO human rights priority country. We work to protect and promote human rights in Pakistan through our diplomatic engagement and programme funding. This includes regularly raising concerns about the misuse of blasphemy laws, both in principle and in relation to specific cases. I underlined the importance of promoting religious tolerance and harmony with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister Azam Tarar on 4 September.

■ Spain: Floods**Alicia Kearns:**[\[13001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 12092 on Spain: Floods, how many British citizens have been affected by floods in Spain.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has provided consular assistance in 31 cases to British nationals and/or their families, who have been affected by the floods. We encourage anyone seeking assistance to contact the FCDO on 020 7008 5000 from the UK or +34 917 146 300 from Spain.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**■ Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse****Dr Danny Chambers:**[\[13075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve uptake of community alcohol services.

Andrew Gwynne:

A vital part of delivering the Health Mission shift to prevention will be action to reduce the harms from excess alcohol consumption. The Department of Health and Social Care is continuing to invest in improvements to local drug and alcohol treatment services. Funding for drug and alcohol treatment services is provided through the public health grant. In addition, local authorities have a further £267 million from the Department of Health and Social Care this year to improve quality and capacity of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery. This is alongside £105 million made available by the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to

improve housing and employment outcomes for people affected by alcohol and drug use.

The latest provisional data from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System for the year ending in September 2024 suggests that there were over 97,000 adults in community treatment for alcohol and not any other drug and over 45,000 adults in treatment for problems with both alcohol and non-opiates. The number of people in treatment for alcohol and not any other drug has increased by 34% since the year ending August 2020 and is currently the highest since records began in 2005/6.

Additionally, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities has published a commissioning quality standard providing guidance for local authorities to support them in commissioning effective alcohol and drug treatment and recovery services in their areas. The Department of Health and Social Care will soon publish the United Kingdom Clinical guidelines on alcohol treatment which will include recommendations on developing effective, accessible, and inclusive services. More information on the commissioning quality standard is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commissioning-quality-standard-alcohol-and-drug-services>

■ **Ambulance Services: Misuse**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[12730]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce the impact on the NHS from individuals who repeatedly misuse emergency ambulance services.

Karin Smyth:

Inappropriate calls to 999 for an ambulance can impact on the availability and timeliness of services in a real emergency. All ambulance trusts have policies to deal with inappropriate or vexatious calls, and to manage frequent callers.

NHS England delivers a number of nationwide National Health Service campaigns to support the public to access NHS services at the right time and in the right way.

Campaign resources are also made available for local NHS organisations and teams to use, and they are encouraged to use these to run their own local campaign activity.

■ **Bipolar Disorder: Health Services**

Dr Danny Chambers:

[13071]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he is taking steps to create specialist services for people with bipolar disorder.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Community Mental Health Framework set out a vision for transforming community mental health services. The vision is a whole person, whole population approach to community health services, with new integrated models between primary and secondary care that can deliver more flexible, personalised, and holistic care for

more people with serious mental illness, including for people with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Since April 2021, all areas have received significant additional, ring-fenced funding to develop these new integrated primary and community mental health services, built around Primary Care Networks, in line with the Community Mental Health Framework. Systems have made significant progress in rolling out these integrated models of care, including for people with a diagnosis of bi-polar disorder.

In addition, people of all ages who are in crisis or who are concerned about a family or loved one can now call 111, select the mental health option, and speak to a trained mental health professional. National Health Service staff can guide callers with next steps such as organising face-to-face community support or facilitating access to alternative services, like crisis cafés or safe havens, which provide a place for people to stay as an alternative to accident and emergency or hospital admission.

■ **Bipolar Disorder: Training**

Dr Danny Chambers:

[\[13072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) GPs and (b) other healthcare professionals receive adequate training to (a) screen for bipolar disorder, (b) manage it effectively and (c) prevent the inappropriate prescription of antidepressants.

Stephen Kinnock:

The standard of training for general practitioners and other health care professionals is the responsibility of the independent statutory regulatory bodies, which set the outcome standards expected at undergraduate level and approve courses, and higher education institutions, which write and teach the curricula content that enables their students to meet the regulators' outcome standards.

Whilst not all curricula may necessarily highlight a specific condition, they all nevertheless emphasize the skills and approaches a Health Care Practitioner must develop to ensure accurate and timely diagnoses and appropriate treatment plans for their patients, including those with bipolar disorder.

Once qualified, health care professionals are responsible for ensuring their own clinical knowledge remains up to date, and for identifying learning needs as part of their continuing professional development. This should include taking account of new research and guidance, such as that produced by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, to ensure that they can continue to provide high-quality care to all patients.

■ **Bowel Cancer: Diagnosis**

Tom Gordon:

[\[13009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help increase the early diagnosis rate for bowel cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department is taking steps to improve the rate of early diagnosis for all cancers, including bowel and bowel-related cancers. We will support the National Health Service to transform diagnostic services by spending £1.5 billion on new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners, to build capacity for over 30,000 more procedures and 1.25 million diagnostic tests.

■ Bowel Cancer: Health Services**Tom Gordon:**[\[13147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve outcomes for bowel cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Health Service is taking crucial steps to improve cancer outcomes for patients across England, including for bowel cancer. We will improve cancer survival rates and hit all NHS cancer waiting time targets, so no patient waits longer than they should.

The NHS will maximise the pace of roll-out of additional diagnostic capacity, delivering the final year of the three-year investment plan for establishing community diagnostic centres (CDCs) and ensuring timely implementation of new CDC locations and upgrades to existing CDCs, with capacity prioritised for cancer diagnostics.

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening program currently invites people aged between 56 and 74 years old for screening every two years. However, this age cohort is increasing to people aged between 50 and 74 years old by 2025 with the use of Faecal Immunochemical Test kits which can be sent directly to people's homes.

■ Breast Cancer: Genetics**Clive Jones:**[\[12589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to test people diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer for the BRCA gene mutation.

Andrew Gwynne:

Genomic testing in the National Health Service in England is provided through the NHS Genomic Medicine Service, and delivered by a national genomic testing network of seven NHS Genomic Laboratory Hubs (GLHs). The NHS GLHs deliver testing as directed by the National Genomic Test Directory (NGTD), which includes tests for over 7,000 rare diseases and over 200 cancer clinical indications, including both whole genome sequencing (WGS) and non-WGS testing. The NGTD is updated regularly and sets out the eligibility criteria for patients to access testing.

Genomic testing for inherited breast cancer is covered in the NGTD under clinical indications R208 and R444, and includes testing for a range of patients with triple negative breast cancer.

Clive Jones:

[\[12590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to ensure that people diagnosed with (a) triple negative breast cancer and (b) the BRCA gene mutation are offered genetic counselling.

Andrew Gwynne:

Genomic testing in the National Health Service in England is provided through the NHS Genomic Medicine Service and delivered by a national genomic testing network of seven NHS Genomic Laboratory Hubs. Individuals should discuss with their healthcare professional whether genomic testing is appropriate for them. Following review, the healthcare professional will then make a decision whether to refer the individual either directly or via an NHS Clinical Genomics Service (CGS), or other relevant clinical speciality for genomic testing. The 17 NHS CGSs, commissioned by NHS England, deliver a comprehensive clinical genomic and counselling service that directs the diagnosis, risk assessment, and lifelong clinical management of patients of all ages and their families who have, or are at risk of having, a rare genetic or genomic condition.

■ Cancer: Clinical Trials

Paul Davies:

[\[13077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress his Department has made on the NHS Long Term plan target of increasing clinical trial participation for children and young people with cancer to 50% by 2025.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department is committed to maximising our potential to lead the world in clinical trials and ensuring clinical trials are more accessible, including for children and young people. The Department does not hold data on the overall percentage of children and young people with cancer that are enrolled in clinical trials nationwide, but does collect data on participation through National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funded infrastructure.

The Department funds research and research infrastructure through the NIHR. NIHR-funded infrastructure is enabling clinical trial participation for children and young people with cancer. In particular, the NIHR Clinical Research Network, now the NIHR Research Delivery Network, supported 15 cancer studies which children and young people were eligible for between 2021/22 and 2023/24, and across all these studies, 715 total participants were recruited during this timeframe.

Through the NIHR, the Department also jointly funds the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centre Paediatric Cancer Network with Cancer Research UK and the Little Princess Trust, which brings together clinicians and translational scientists to run early phase clinical trials for children and young people with cancer.

■ Cancer: Medical Treatments

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[12419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to meet the target for 85% of cancer patients to be treated within 62 days of referral.

Karin Smyth:

We will get the National Health Service diagnosing cancer on time or earlier, treating it faster, and we will improve patients' experience across the system.

Improving 62-day performance and early diagnosis are already key priorities for NHS England. Lord Darzi's report will inform our 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS, which includes further details on how we will improve cancer diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes.

■ Cancer: Young People

Paul Davies:

[\[13078\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve (a) diagnosis and (b) referral rates for 13–24-year-olds with cancer.

Paul Davies:

[\[13079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to ensure that the priorities of (a) children and (b) young people with cancer are included within the ten-year plan.

Karin Smyth:

We are committed to getting the National Health Service diagnosing cancer earlier and treating it faster, so that more patients survive this horrible set of diseases. This includes children, teenagers, and young adults.

The Department is taking steps to improving waiting times for cancer diagnosis across all cancer patient groups in England. We will start by delivering an extra 40,000 scans, appointments, and operations each week to ensure that patients are seen as quickly as possible.

We are also working with the NHS to maximise the pace of the roll-out of additional diagnostic capacity, delivering the final year of the three-year investment plan for establishing Community Diagnostic Centres, with capacity prioritised for cancer. This will help us continue to meet the Faster Diagnosis Standard, which aims to ensure that over 75% patients have cancer diagnosed or ruled out within 28 days of referral from a general practice (GP) or screening service.

To support timely and effective referrals, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has set out detailed guidance for GPs on the symptoms of cancer in children and young people, recommending referral within 48 hours for those presenting with a range of potential cancer symptoms.

Lord Darzi's independent investigation into the NHS highlighted that there is more to be done to increase the speed at which patients are diagnosed with and treated for

cancer. His report will inform our 10-year plan to reform the NHS, which will include further details on how we will improve cancer diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes. This includes children and young people.

On 21 October 2024, the Department launched a national engagement exercise to inform the plan. We encourage people and organisations who would like to share their views on the priorities of children and young people with cancer to do so via the online platform, [change.NHS.UK](https://change.nhs.uk). Following the engagement exercise, the Department will carefully consider how the priorities of this group should be reflected in the plan and any subsequent work.

■ Charities: Employers' Contributions

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[12556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October, what discussions he has had with health and care charities on the potential impact of increased National Insurance contributions on their ability to (a) support and (b) provide NHS care.

Karin Smyth:

No discussions have taken place with health and care charities on the potential impact of increased National Insurance contributions on their ability to support and provide National Health Service care.

To repair the public finances and help raise the revenue required to increase funding for public services, the Government has taken the difficult decision to increase employer National Insurance. On the impact on charities in particular, our tax regime for charities, including exemption from paying business rates, is among the most generous of anywhere in the world, with tax reliefs for charities and their donors worth just over £6 billion for the tax year to April 2024.

■ Counselling and Psychiatry: Regulation

Rachael Maskell: [\[10095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to regulate the (a) psychotherapy and (b) counselling professions.

Rachael Maskell: [\[10096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to prevent (a) counsellors and (b) psychotherapists from working if they are not on a voluntary register.

Rachael Maskell: [\[10097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the risks of (a) counsellors and (b) psychotherapists working without (i) statutory regulation and (ii) protection of title.

Rachael Maskell:

[\[10098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help ensure that clinicians who have been found to have posed a risk to patients cannot set up as independent (a) psychotherapists and (b) counsellors.

Rachael Maskell:

[\[10099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help ensure that (a) psychotherapists and (b) counsellors are subject to (i) professional supervision and (ii) continuous professional development.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 24 October 2024]: The Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA) operates a voluntary registers programme, which provides a proportionate means of assurance for unregulated professions, that sits between employer controls and statutory regulation by setting standards for organisations holding voluntary registers for unregulated health and social care occupations.

Whilst statutory regulation is sometimes necessary where significant risks to users of services cannot be mitigated in other ways, it is not always the most proportionate means of ensuring public protection. Titles can only be protected for statutorily regulated professions.

The Government would encourage anyone accessing the services of independent psychotherapists or counsellors to establish whether a practitioner is registered with a voluntary accredited register through the PSA website. To meet the standards for PSA accreditation, an organisation must have a focus on public protection and robust processes for handling complaints against practitioners. The organisations accredited by the PSA are independent and do not fall under Government oversight, and any decisions about the practice requirements for the professions they represent are a matter for employers and organisations and their members.

Individual employers are responsible for ensuring their staff are appropriately qualified and that they keep their skills and practice up to date.

■ General Practitioners

Josh Newbury:

[\[10839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 29 October 2024]: The Department of Health and Social Care has funded, via the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) a project to look at the impact of non-GP staff in practices on patient care.

Through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme, Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and practices have recruited over 37,000 additional staff including Pharmacists, Physiotherapists, and social prescribing link workers. These roles are in place to assist doctors in general practice in reducing their workload, assisting

patients directly with their needs, allowing doctors to focus on more complex patients and other priorities, including continuity of care.

From October, PCNs have also been able to recruit newly qualified GPs through the scheme with an additional £82m of funding. Roles employed through the scheme increase capacity and improve access to appointments.

■ General Practitioners: Essex

James McMurdock:

[\[12831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of GPs in Essex.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have committed to training thousands more general practitioners (GPs) across the country, including in Essex, which will increase capacity and take pressure off those currently working in the system. NHS England is working to address training bottlenecks so the health service has enough staff for the future, and we are providing £82 million to fund the recruitment of over 1,000 newly qualified GPs, via the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme, so patients can get the care they need.

The Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board advises that there are currently 30 GPs on its Enhanced GP Fellowship Scheme, developed to support GP retention and recruitment. Additional fellowship opportunities, both portfolio and core, are due to launch in December 2024. A GP Fellowship Scheme is in place in Thurrock to specifically increase GP recruitment in the area. There has been an increase in the number of training practices, and Mid and South Essex now has 207 educators and 80 Training Practices.

■ Genetics: Research

Jim Shannon:

[\[12718\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what funding his Department provides for research on rare genetic disorders.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department remains committed to supporting research into rare diseases, and pioneering research is an underpinning theme of the UK Rare Diseases Framework. Since April 2022, the Department has invested over £2.2 million for the National Institute of Health and Care Research to carry out research programmes related to rare genetic diseases, and £341 million for Genomics England. This covers all funding allocated to Genomics England for the 2022/23 to 2024/25 financial years, including to deliver the National Genomic Research Library to enable research into rare genetic diseases, and for the Generation Study to evaluate the use of whole genome sequencing to diagnose rare genetic conditions in newborns.

■ Health and Care Act 2022**Peter Prinsley:** [\[13103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to implement section 95 of the Health and Care Act 2022.

Karin Smyth:

The Department plans to commence section 95 in 2025. This will be subject to Parliament's approval of the regulations setting out the procedure for preparing and publishing mandatory information standards, which are a necessary part of the package of measures introduced by section 95.

■ Health Services: Waiting Lists**James McMurdock:** [\[12824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress his Department has made on reducing waiting lists for planned care in Essex.

Karin Smyth:

Tackling waiting lists is a key part of our Health Mission. We will deliver an extra two million operations, scans, and appointments, equivalent to 40,000 per week, in our first year, as part of our commitment to ensuring patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks across the whole country, including in Essex.

There are three integrated care boards (ICBs) that border Essex: Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB, Mid and South Essex ICB and Suffolk and North East Essex ICB. The total Consultant-led Referral to Treatment Waiting List across these ICBs has decreased by 44,786 or 7.9% between 31 August 2023 and 31 August 2024.

■ Hearing Aids: Batteries**Claire Young:** [R] [\[13154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his Department's policy is on the provision of rechargeable hearing aids on the NHS.

Claire Young: [R] [\[13155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the yearly cost to the NHS is of the provision of replacement hearing aid batteries.

Claire Young: [R] [\[13157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential risk to vulnerable people of the accidental ingestion of hearing aid batteries.

Andrew Gwynne:

In terms of the Department's policy on rechargeable hearing aids on the National Health Service, audiology services are locally commissioned and as such the responsibility for meeting the needs of non-hearing adults lies with local NHS commissioners. In July 2016, NHS England published a framework which supports

clinical commissioning groups and assists integrated care boards (ICBs) to make informed decisions about what is good value for the populations they serve, and to provide more consistent, high quality, integrated care. The Framework for Clinical Commissioning Groups is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HLCF.pdf>

NHS England supports ICBs to make informed decisions about the provision of hearing services so that they can provide consistent, high quality, and integrated care to adults with hearing loss.

ICBs commission services to provide hearing aids, and service specification indicates that the NHS will provide up to two packets of hearing aid batteries per hearing aid at a time. If an individual has to have an NHS hearing aid, they can get free batteries and repairs from the NHS hearing aid service who fitted the hearing aids. Both rechargeable and battery powered devices are available on the NHS Supply Chain Framework Agreement, as are the batteries, and over the last 12 months, approximately £4.63 million was spent on batteries by trusts via NHS Supply Chain Framework Agreements, although this may not include all spend by the NHS.

Regarding an assessment of the potential risk to vulnerable people of the accidental ingestion of hearing aid batteries, all users of hearing aids should be provided with the manufacturer's user guide and appropriate guidance on hearing aid and batteries management. Guidance on hearing aid and battery management based on the national safety alert is available at the following link:

https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NatPSA_hearing_aid_batteries_December_2019_FINAL.pdf

There is a known risk to paediatric and vulnerable patients of accidentally ingesting hearing aid batteries, but in the case of paediatric patients, there has to be a tamperproof battery door on the device to meet the product specification. These devices are physically evaluated by a team of audiologists, ahead of being available through the framework agreement. There are also adult devices that have this same provision, so again this mitigates the risk.

Any button and coin batteries can pose a severe health risk, particularly to children, if inserted, swallowed, or ingested. All consumer products must be safe before they can be placed on the market, and the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) published guidance for businesses on the steps to take to mitigate potential battery-related risks in products that incorporate or are powered by button and coin batteries. The guidance for businesses on the use of button and coin batteries, published by the OPSS, is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/using-button-and-coin-batteries>

■ Hospices: Northern Ireland

Jim Shannon:

[\[12421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with his Northern Irish counterpart on funding for hospices.

Stephen Kinnock:

Healthcare, including hospice care, in Northern Ireland is devolved, and therefore a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive, although we are always happy to learn from the experiences of devolved governments.

■ Kidney Diseases: Transplant Surgery

Daisy Cooper:

[\[12988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 4 October 2024 to Question 6540 on Kidney Diseases: Transplant Surgery, what estimate his Department has made of the cost of providing psychological and social care support to all kidney transplant recipients in each of the next five years.

Andrew Gwynne:

A financial assessment for all aspects of renal replacement therapy provision, including transplantation, will be completed as part of the work NHS England is currently undertaking to update the specialised renal service specifications, again including transplantation. This will include reviewing and updating, where appropriate, the requirements for psychological support services, in line with the recommendations of the Renal Services Transformation Programme toolkit. No specific assessment has been made of the cost of providing social care support to all kidney transplant recipients.

■ Lyme Disease: Diagnosis and Medical Treatments

Pippa Heylings:

[\[13156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to improve the (a) diagnosis and (b) treatment of Lyme disease.

Andrew Gwynne:

There are several studies and projects being undertaken in the United Kingdom looking at the prevalence and distribution of Lyme disease. Examples include two studies undertaken in association with National Institute of Health Research. One is focussing on studying the evolution of the disease in patients, and the second is examining the evidence of exposure to the Lyme disease bacteria in the English population.

Clinical advice for general practitioners (GPs) and hospital physicians on Lyme disease is available from the National Health Service. Most cases are diagnosed based on clinical signs by GPs, and laboratory testing is widely available for more complicated cases.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) provides Lyme disease laboratory testing services for England and Wales and issues detailed advice on sample testing.

Lyme disease is treatable with a course of antibiotics in accordance with national guidelines. However, if left untreated, the infection can spread to affect the nervous system, joints, or the heart. More information on the diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/lyme-disease-guidance-data-and-analysis#laboratory-diagnosis>

The UKHSA's Be Tick Aware toolkit provides information resources to enable local stakeholders to deliver public health information on ticks and tick-borne disease prevention directly to their population and visitors. The toolkit is available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/642e966bfbe620000f17ddbe/Be_tick_aware_toolkit.pdf

■ Maternity Services

Samantha Niblett:

[12243]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what comparative assessment he has made of the potential impact of (a) face-to-face meetings and (b) phone appointments for maternity care on patient outcomes.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 5 November 2024]: We are working with the National Health Service as it delivers its three-year maternity and neonatal plan to ensure that care is always delivered in a personalised way. This includes telephone care, which has a place as part of some personalised pathways that also include face-to-face care.

The NHS in England continues to monitor evidence of the impact of face-to-face and phone appointments in maternity care, to ensure all women receive safe and compassionate care which best meets their individual needs.

■ Maternity Services: Women

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[12711]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of trends in the level of maternal health inequalities affecting black women.

Karin Smyth:

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

A key objective in NHS England's three-year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services, which we are currently supporting them to deliver, is to reduce inequalities for all in maternity access, experience, and outcomes, seeking to improve equity for mothers and babies. Ongoing assessment of the impact of our policies and programmes is vital to ensuring that we improve outcomes and tackle inequalities.

■ Medical Equipment: Innovation

Kevin McKenna: [\[12654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the £10 million allocated to the MHRA in March 2023, what progress has been made on accelerating routes for bringing innovative medical products developed onto the market.

Karin Smyth:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) greatly welcomed the £10 million of funding announced by HM Treasury in March 2023, which has enabled the MHRA to make progress on the Innovative Licensing and Access Pathway (ILAP).

The ILAP harnesses the collective expertise of the regulatory and health technology assessment systems and National Health Service bodies, with the aim of supporting medicines from an early stage through to patient access more quickly. Since its launch in 2021, 166 Innovation Passports have been awarded.

The United Kingdom's life sciences ecosystem within which the ILAP sits has evolved, with new regulatory initiatives such as the international recognition procedure. On Wednesday 6 November 2024, the ILAP partner organisations published a statement of policy intent on the relaunch of the ILAP. The new ILAP will continue to target timely patient benefit, take forward lessons learnt from the ILAP to date, and respond to the needs of our fast-paced life sciences sector by providing a more compelling offer of support to the medicine developer. The new ILAP will open to applications in March 2025, with full details of the pathway to be published in January 2025.

■ Medical Equipment: Technology

Jim Shannon: [\[12428\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many medical technologies were (a) piloted in the NHS in (i) 2023 and (ii) 2024, (b) supported after successful pilots in those years and (c) adopted at scale in the last year.

Andrew Gwynne:

In February 2023, the Department published its first ever strategy for MedTech, as well as a one year on update in April 2024, outlining our priorities for improving the adoption and spread of safe, effective, and innovative medical technologies across the National Health Service.

NHS England holds data on innovation adoption and scale for specific NHS England programmes and policies, such as the MedTech Funding Mandate programme.

Providing data on individual programmes in response to this question does not provide a complete picture of activity.

For example, the Health Tech Adoption and Acceleration Fund will have funded a mixture of pilots and scaling of existing programmes, however this was largely managed at local level, and NHS England do not centrally hold data on what is a pilot and what is a scaled programme.

Pilot and evaluation data is held at provider level, which includes acute, primary, community, and secondary care providers. These organisations are not required to report pilot outcomes to NHS England. They work autonomously but in partnership with technology evaluators, academics, researchers, or other expert partners such as the Health Innovation Networks. NHS England produces an annual Health Innovation Network report, which is due to come out this Autumn. The 2022/23 is available at the following link:

<https://thehealthinnovationnetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/AHSN-Network-Workforce-Impact-Report-2023.pdf>

The data is aggregated, so it is not possible to extrapolate from the report how many of the projects are technology pilots.

■ Menopause

Satvir Kaur:

[11791]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the (a) level and (b) quality of support provided by (i) GPs and the (ii) wider medical profession to women experiencing (A) peri-menopausal and (B) menopausal symptoms.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is committed to prioritising women's health as we reform the National Health Service. Evidence from the women's health strategy call for evidence in 2021 identified difficulties accessing care due to lack of recognition of symptoms from both women and healthcare professionals, and reluctance of some healthcare professionals to prescribe hormone replacement therapy for menopause symptoms.

A range of information and resources are available to help primary care professionals to support women experiencing menopause symptoms. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) has a holistic curriculum of training that all general practitioners (GPs) must cover before they are able to pass the examination to become a member of the RCGP and work independently as a GP. There is a specific section on women's health, including menopause. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is also updating its guideline on menopause diagnosis and management.

The Department has also 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. These provide more specialist care for women in the community, and many

of them also act as a point of training and support for their local GP community. Menopause care is a core service for pilot women's health hubs.

■ **Mental Health Services: Children and Young People**

Natasha Irons:

[\[12811\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of (a) children and (b) young people that are waiting for mental health support.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is unacceptable that too many children and young people are not receiving the mental health care they need, and we know that waits for mental health services are far too long. That is why we will recruit 8,500 additional mental health workers across both adult, and children and young people's mental health services.

The Department of Health and Social Care is working with Department for Education to consider how to deliver our commitment of access to a specialist mental health professional in every school. Alongside this we are working towards rolling out Young Futures hubs in every community, offering open access mental health services for young people.

■ **Mental Health Services: Essex**

James McMurdock:

[\[12823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve mental health services in Essex.

Stephen Kinnock:

People with mental health issues in Essex are not getting the support or care they deserve, which is why we will fix the system to ensure that mental health is given the same attention and focus as physical health, so that people can be confident in accessing high quality mental health support when they need it. We will recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers nationally to reduce delays and provide faster treatment which will also help ease pressure on hospitals, as well as introduce specialist mental health professionals in every school and roll out "Young Futures hubs" in every community. By cutting mental health waiting lists and intervening earlier with more timely mental health support, we can get this country back to good health.

In addition, people of all ages who are in crisis or who are concerned about a family or loved one can now call 111, select the mental health option, and speak to a trained mental health professional. National Health Service staff can guide callers with next steps such as organising face-to-face community support or facilitating access to alternative services, like crisis cafés or safe havens, which provide a place for people to stay as an alternative to accident and emergency or a hospital admission.

■ Mental Health Services: Finance**Rachael Maskell:** [\[7470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding he plans to provide for community mental health hubs in the next three financial years.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department does not hold this information centrally.

Investment in NHS community services for children and adults is subject to the outcome of future spending reviews.

■ Mental Health: Children**Dr Danny Chambers:** [\[13074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce waiting times for mental health diagnoses of children.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is unacceptable that too many children and young people are not receiving the mental health care they need, and we know that waits for mental health services are far too long, which can impact on them receiving a diagnosis. That is why we will recruit 8,500 additional mental health workers across both adult, and children and young people's mental health services, to help reduce delays and provide faster treatment.

The Department of Health and Social Care is also working with the Department for Education and NHS England to consider how to deliver our commitment of access to a specialist mental health professional in every school.

■ Microplastics: Babies**Jim Shannon:** [\[11862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the exposure of babies to microplastics.

Andrew Gwynne:

While there are National Health Service trusts involved in research on the effects of microplastics on certain health issues, the Department has made no assessment of the potential implications for policies of the exposure of babies to microplastics.

■ Migraines: Health Services**Alicia Kearns:** [\[12755\]](#)

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

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guideline, Headaches: Diagnosis and management of headaches in young people and adults, updated in

December 2021, sets out best practice for healthcare professionals in the care, treatment, and support of people who suffer from headaches, including migraines. It aims to improve the recognition and management of headaches and migraines.

At the national level, there are a number of initiatives supporting service improvement and better care for patients with migraines, including the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) Programme for Neurology and the RightCare Headache and Migraine Toolkit. The GIRFT Programme published a National Speciality Report, which makes several recommendations in relation to improving the recognition and diagnosis of migraines by general practitioners. Additionally, the RightCare Headache and Migraine Toolkit sets out key priorities for improving care for patients with migraines, which includes correct identification and diagnosis of headache disorders.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has developed two e-learning modules about migraines and cluster headaches, which aim to raise awareness amongst primary care clinicians about the different types of migraines and their associated symptoms, and how to differentiate.

Over the last four years, a new class of drugs, calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP) inhibitors, has been made available on the National Health Service for the prevention and treatment of episodic and chronic migraines. On 15 May 2024, Atogepant became the latest CGRP inhibitor for which the NICE has published guidance. The NICE recommended Atogepant for use as a preventive medication for the treatment of migraines on the NHS in England.

■ **Nusinersen: East Midlands**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[12689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many NHS patients have been treated with Spinraza in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) the East Midlands since 2019.

Karin Smyth:

Use of nusinersen, also known by the brand name Spinraza, is commissioned from specialist centres, and in the East Midlands the service is commissioned from Nottingham University Hospital (NUH). NUH has treated eight patients with nusinersen since 2019. No patients were treated in Lincolnshire hospitals, as there is no specialist centre there.

■ **Podiatry: Runcorn and Helsby**

Mike Amesbury:

[\[10125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an estimate of the average waiting time for podiatry appointments in Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

Podiatry services are commissioned locally. In Runcorn and Helsby, podiatry services are provided by Halton Podiatry hosted by Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. The average wait for podiatry services is 18 weeks.

■ Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Ambulance Services**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[12731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce instances of post traumatic stress disorder within the ambulance service.

Karin Smyth:

At a national level, NHS England has a wide-ranging package of support for National Health Service staff. This includes a health and wellbeing guardian role to ensure board level scrutiny of local support systems, a focus on healthy working environments, tools, resources to support line managers to hold meaningful conversations with staff to discuss their wellbeing, and emotional and psychological health and wellbeing support.

NHS England has worked with The Ambulance Staff Charity to fund the development of the Ambulance Staff Crisis phonenumber which provides immediate, independent, and confidential support to ambulance staff experiencing suicidal ideation or a mental health crisis. Further information on The Ambulance Staff Charity is available at the following link:

<https://www.theasc.org.uk/>

■ Prescriptions: Care Leavers**Darren Paffey:** [\[12907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential feasibility of extending free prescriptions to care leavers aged 18 to 25.

Karin Smyth:

There are no current plans to make an assessment of the feasibility of extending free prescriptions to care leavers aged 18 to 25 years old.

■ Prostate Cancer: Drugs**Chris Ward:** [\[12664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress he has made on the development of a clinical policy relating to the use of abiraterone acetate as a first-line treatment for men with locally advanced high-risk prostate cancer; and when he expects to take a decision.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England has developed a policy proposal for abiraterone acetate and prednisolone to be used as a routine commissioning treatment option for high-risk, hormone sensitive, non-metastatic prostate cancer.

In line with NHS England's service development process, the policy proposal was considered by NHS England's Clinical Priorities Advisory Group (CPAG) in May 2024. Work is currently underway to confirm decisions on new treatments, the

position will be resolved as soon as possible, and NHS England will update clinicians and patient groups on the outcome.

The CPAG's role is to make recommendations on the relative cost and benefit of different proposals, where they are outside the remit of the NICE, which in this case is because the treatment is an off-label use of abiraterone acetate and prednisolone. The CPAG assigns a priority level to different policies which may be funded through available discretionary funding.

■ Prostate Cancer: Research

Jim Shannon:

[\[12422\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will provide additional funding for prostate cancer (a) care and (b) research.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to getting the National Health Service diagnosing cancer earlier and treating it faster, so that more patients survive with better outcomes, including for those with prostate cancer. The NHS is working towards the Faster Diagnosis Standard (FDS), which ensures a patient receives their cancer diagnosis or has cancer ruled out within 28 days of an urgent referral. NHS England has streamlined cancer pathways, including implementing a best-timed prostate cancer diagnostic pathway, so that those suspected of prostate cancer receive a multi-parametric magnetic resonance imaging scan first, which ensures that only those men most at-risk undergo an invasive biopsy. Best practice timed pathways support the on-going improvement effort to shorten diagnosis pathways, reduce variation, improve experience of care, and meet the FDS.

Furthermore, the NHS England's Getting It Right First Time programme published guidance in April 2024 to support the implementation of good practice in the management of prostate cancer, which includes ensuring the diagnostic pathways for prostate cancer were implemented from a primary care setting to a secondary care presentation.

The Government is strongly committed to supporting research into cancer. Through partnerships with patients, researchers, funders, and charities we continue to play a significant role in global efforts against the disease. Research is crucial in tackling cancer, which is why the Department invests £1.5 billion per year in health research 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.

The TRANSFORM trial is an important example of prostate cancer research, as a £42 million screening trial which aims to find ways of detecting prostate cancer earlier. Prostate Cancer UK is leading the development of the trial, with the Government contributing £16 million through the NIHR. The TRANSFORM trial will also aim to address some of the inequalities that exist in prostate cancer diagnosis

today, ensuring that at least 10% of the men who are invited to participate in the trial are black, to inform a targeted approach for earlier diagnosis.

The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including prostate cancer. 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.

■ Prostate Cancer: Screening

John Slinger:

[\[12844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to introduce prostate cancer testing for men at earlier ages than is currently available.

Andrew Gwynne:

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

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

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

■ Sodium Valproate and Surgical Mesh Implants: Compensation

Alex Easton:

[\[13158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Patient Safety Commissioner's report entitled The Hughes Report: Options for redress for those harmed by valproate and pelvic mesh, published on 7 February 2024, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of sodium valproate on families affected by fetal valproate syndrome in Northern Ireland; and what steps his Department is taking to ensure a UK-wide redress scheme for those affected by that syndrome.

Andrew Gwynne:

The impact of sodium valproate on families affected by fetal valproate syndrome in Northern Ireland is a transferred matter and is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive, therefore an assessment has not been made by the Department of Health and Social Care.

The Government is carefully considering the valuable work done by the Patient Safety Commissioner and the resulting Hughes Report, which set out options for redress for those harmed by valproate and pelvic mesh. We will be providing an update to the Patient Safety Commissioner's report at the earliest opportunity. Although the Hughes Report and its recommendations only cover patients harmed in England, the Government recognises that any response will likely have implications for the whole of the United Kingdom, and is engaging with the devolved administrations on the Hughes Report.

HOME OFFICE

■ Abuse: Woman

Mrs Elsie Blundell:

[12778]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to make it easier for women to report abuse experienced when they have been exercising in public.

Jess Phillips:

This Government has set out an unprecedented ambition to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in a decade, and we are determined to use every lever available to us to deliver on that aim.

That means working across Government departments to tackle threats to women's safety in all areas of their lives, including in public spaces.

This year, the Home Office is providing £15 million to support communities through a variety of preventative interventions such as improved CCTV and streetlighting, public guardianship schemes, and behavioural change initiatives including educational programmes to help change attitudes towards women and girls.

In addition to reporting via 999 and the 101 non-emergency number, anyone who has experienced abuse which is not an emergency can report it through the Single Online Home (SOH) reporting tool (www.police.uk/pu/contact-us/). As of November 2024, 40 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales plus British Transport Police have been onboarded onto the Single Online platform and one further force is currently onboarding.

■ Asylum: Housing

James McMurdock:

[12629]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of the Overseas Development Assistance budget was spent on accommodating asylum seekers in the UK in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Hon Gentleman to the FCDO's publication of final UK Overseas Development Assistance for 2023, published in September 2024, and available at the following link:

[Statistics on International Development: final UK ODA spend 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-international-development-final-uk-oda-spend-2023)

Asylum: Refugees

Chris Murray: [12508]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of refugee status were made to asylum seekers whose place of residence was Scotland in 2023; and in what type of accommodation they were housed at the time of grant.

Chris Murray: [12509]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of refugee status were made to asylum seekers whose place of residence was Scotland in 2022; and in what type of accommodation they were housed at the time of grant.

Chris Murray: [12510]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of refugee status were made to asylum seekers whose place of residence was Scotland in 2021; and in what type of accommodation they were housed at the time of grant.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on grants at initial decision is published in table Asy_D02 of the '[Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets](#)'. Data on grants of refugee status by location or accommodation type is not published.

Data on those in receipt of asylum support by UK region and accommodation type is available in table Asy_D09 of the '[Asylum seekers in receipt of support detailed dataset](#)'. Location data for those who are not in receipt of support is not published.

Community Policing: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes: [12368]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many police officers are employed in neighbourhood policing in Lincolnshire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office collects and publishes data annually on the primary function of police officers, as at 31 March each year, in the 'Police workforce, England and Wales' statistical bulletin which can be accessed here:

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

Table F1 of the data tables accompanying the publication provides the number of officers in “Neighbourhood Policing” roles, by Police Force Area, as at 31 March 2024.

■ Crime: Lancashire

Ashley Dalton: [\[13002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps she has taken to tackle rural crime in Lancashire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Rural crime can have devastating consequences for communities. That is why this Government is committed to cracking down on crime and disorder in rural areas, with tougher powers for the police to tackle antisocial behaviour, and to prevent farm theft and fly-tipping.

The National Rural Crime Unit, takes the lead on improving co-ordination and partnership working, which provides police forces with specialist operational support in their responses to rural crime, such as the theft of farming or construction machinery.

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.

■ Crime: Rural Areas

Rebecca Smith: [\[12611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure that victims of rural crime in areas with poor (a) phone and (b) internet coverage are able to report those crimes promptly.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is committed to working with the police and other partners to address the blight of rural crime, with the introduction of stronger powers for the police to tackle antisocial behaviour, and action to tackle farm theft and fly-tipping.

We are recruiting 13,000 more neighbourhood police and police community support officers, including in rural areas, to ensure communities have somewhere to turn to report crimes and to report concerns.

Improving telecoms is a Department of Science Innovation and Technology lead.

■ Crime: Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe: [\[12491\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 1 November 2024 to Question 11117 on Crime: Undocumented Migrants, what information her Department holds on the number of crimes committed by undocumented migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The information requested is not available from published statistics.

Any foreign national who is convicted of a crime and given a prison sentence is considered for deportation at the earliest opportunity.

Under the UK Borders Act 2007, a deportation order must be made where a foreign national has been convicted of an offence and received a custodial sentence of 12 months or more. A foreign national who has been convicted of an offence that has caused serious harm, who is a persistent offender or who represents a threat to national security may also be considered for deportation under the Immigration Act 1971, where it is conducive to the public good.

We are committed to delivering justice for victims and safer streets for our communities. Foreign nationals who commit crime should be in no doubt that the law will be enforced and, where appropriate, we will pursue their deportation, and they will be swiftly removed from the country.

■ Dogs: Animal Experiments**Alex Mayer:**[\[12519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps her Department has taken to protect the welfare of beagles bred for sale to animal testing facilities.

Alex Mayer:[\[12520\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the number of beagles being bred for use in laboratory experiments in the UK.

Alex Mayer:[\[12521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of number of beagles needed for use in laboratory experiments in the UK.

Dan Jarvis:

animals bred in the UK for use in scientific procedures. All establishments licenced to breed protected animals under ASPA are required to comply with the published Code of Practice, which sets out standards for the appropriate care and accommodation of animals, including dogs.

The majority of Beagles bred for use in science (85%) are for the purposes of regulatory testing under legislation on pharmaceutical products for human use. The number of Beagles bred is largely determined by the forecast needs of the pharmaceutical industry that require testing of medicines, and the Animals in Science Regulation Unit conducts both announced and unannounced audits to ensure establishments compliance with the terms of their licences, the Code of Practice and with ASPA.

The Home Office assures that, in every research proposal, animals are replaced with non-animal alternatives wherever possible, the number of animals are reduced to the

minimum necessary to achieve the result sought, and that, for those animals which must be used, procedures are refined as much as possible to minimise their suffering.

The Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) is leading on plans to accelerate the development, validation and uptake of alternatives to animal testing.

■ Immigration: Arrests and Prosecutions

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the Government's policy is on checking the immigration status of individuals during the process of arrest to prosecution.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Where relevant, the Police will check the immigration status of individuals they arrest with Immigration Enforcement. The purpose of sharing this information is to assist in establishing identity.

Any foreign national who is convicted of a crime and given a prison sentence is considered for deportation at the earliest opportunity.

■ Immigration: Domestic Abuse

Laura Kyrke-Smith:

[\[12621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure decisions on whether to grant Indefinite Leave to Remain under Appendix VDA are made (a) correctly and (b) with reference to appropriate evidence.

Seema Malhotra:

All applications are decided by a dedicated and specialised casework team in accordance with Appendix Victim of Domestic Abuse which sets out the requirements to be met to qualify for settlement (Indefinite Leave to Remain) where a relevant relationship has broken down because of domestic abuse. If the application is refused, the person can apply for an Administrative Review where they feel the decision is incorrect due to a case working error.

Associated guidance provides examples of evidence that can be provided and factors to consider when deciding applications. All information and evidence available are considered in the round when deciding on the balance of probabilities, if the relationship broke down because of domestic abuse.

■ Immigration: Proof of Identity

Lisa Smart:

[\[12488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help improve the (a) accuracy and (b) reliability of personal immigration status information generated by the Government View and Prove system; and what safeguards her Department plans to introduce to avoid system failures.

Seema Malhotra:

The transition towards eVisas is already underway, with millions of people already receiving and using eVisas successfully, by logging into the View and Prove service using their UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) account.

While most people are able to use the online services successfully without problems, where issues do occur, we have robust processes in place. Any person experiencing issues with their eVisa should contact the UKVI Resolution Centre which provides a full range of digital and telephone support. The Resolution Centre can assist users who are experiencing technical issues with their eVisa, and where necessary, enable a person's status to be verified through alternative means.

As part of our move to an immigration system which is more digital and streamlined, we stopped issuing any new BRPs and BRCs on 31 October 2024. People with existing permission in the UK are encouraged to take action now to create a UKVI account if they have not already done so, to access their eVisa. Most people will be able to see their status right away. Anyone who cannot do so should be able to see their status shortly. Those who cannot see their status can use the existing [Prove your right to work to an employer: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-right-to-work-to-an-employer) and [Prove your right to rent in England: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-right-to-rent-in-england) online services in the meantime, and, if they still have it, use their BRP to prove their rights for other purposes. Otherwise, they should contact the UKVI Resolution Centre.

We have designed our digital services to be highly resilient, with rigorous testing to build assurance, and deployed across multiple data centres. Our online services and their constituent parts are also proactively monitored for failures, which highlight any potential problems to allow support teams to triage and resolve them as quickly as possible. We are constantly improving the accuracy, reliability and accessibility of our digital status services, including the View and Prove service. This includes proactive work to enhance the service as well as resolving issues reported to us by customers. We also continue to engage with stakeholders to test whether any improvements to implementation or our communications need to be made. The View and Prove platform is rigorously tested for security and stability and proven to be reliable in terms of availability.

■ Immigration: Scotland**Chris Murray:**[\[12511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of indefinite leave to remain were made to people in the UK on other visa routes whose place of residence was Scotland at the time of grant in 2023; and on what visa statuses they were at the time of grant.

Chris Murray:[\[12512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of indefinite leave to remain were made to people in the UK on other visa routes whose place of

residence was Scotland at the time of grant in 2022; and on what visa statuses they were at the time of grant.

Chris Murray: [\[12513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of indefinite leave to remain were made to people in the UK on other visa routes whose place of residence was Scotland at the time of grant in 2021; and on what visa statuses they were at the time of grant.

Chris Murray: [\[12640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of UK citizenship were made to people resident in Scotland in 2023.

Chris Murray: [\[12641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of UK citizenship were made to people resident in Scotland in 2022.

Chris Murray: [\[12642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many grants of UK citizenship were made to people resident in Scotland in 2021.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office publishes data on Settlement and Citizenship grants in the [‘Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release’](#). However, this information is not broken down by place of residence or UK region.

The published statistics can be found in the Settlement data tables and in the Citizenship data tables. Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the ‘Notes’ page of the workbook. The latest data relate to 2024 Q2.

■ Leicestershire Police: Finance

Dr Luke Evans: [\[12594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support the long-term funding of Leicestershire Police.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The 2024-25 police funding settlement provides Leicestershire Police with funding of up to £256.0 million in 2024-25. The Home Office will provide additional government grant funding of £175 million to policing in 2024-25 to support the costs of the 2024 police pay award, from which Leicestershire will receive a further £2.4 million.

The Budget published on 30 October confirmed that the core government grant for police forces in England and Wales will increase in 2025-26. Further details and force level allocations will be set out at the forthcoming provisional settlement in December.

Funding for future years beyond 2025-26 will be set out in phase 2 of the Spending Review.

■ Migrants: Homelessness

Neil Coyle:

[\[12946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many assessments for destitution her Department made for people subject to no recourse to public funds conditions in 2023.

Seema Malhotra:

We are unable to provide this information as it is not routinely published, and it can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

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

■ Radicalism

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people were referred to the Prevent programme by their ideological motivation in each year since 2014.

Dan Jarvis:

The breakdown of statistical data on the individuals referred to the Prevent Programme by their associated type of concern since the financial year 2016/17 to 2022/23, can be found in Table 6 (Type of Concern of those referred, discussed at a Channel panel and adopted as a Channel case, 2016/17 to 2022/23) of the latest published statistics which are available under the Home Office's latest counter-terrorism statistical series: *Individuals referred to Prevent: to March 2023 - GOV.UK* (www.gov.uk). Data on the individuals referred to Prevent by the extended list of type of concern under the main 10 high level categories before the financial year 2016/17 is not available due to changes in the categories available in the Police Case Management (PCM) data recording system as outlined in the *user guide*.

We have also included a summary of this data below in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of individuals referred to the Prevent Programme by their type of concern each year since the financial year ending 2016

TYPE OF CONCERN	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Extreme Right Wing	968	1,387	1,402	1,404	1,229	1,309	1,310
Islamist	3,706	3,462	1,421	1,510	1,077	1,027	781
Other	725	1,160	803	219	107	100	112
Conflicted	0	0	0	233	323	1,020	1,214

TYPE OF CONCERN	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
No specific extremism issue	282	863	1,032	232	0	0	0
High CT risk but no ideology present	0	0	0	70	41	5	5
Vulnerability present but no ideology or CT risk	0	0	0	1,594	1,600	2,127	2,505
No risk, vulnerability or Ideology Present	0	0	0	676	387	587	654
School massacre	0	0	79	236	109	154	159
Incel	0	0	0	0	3	77	69
Unspecified	412	446	1,000	113	39	0	8
Total	6,093	7,318	5,737	6,287	4,915	6,406	6,817

Data on the number of referrals made between April 2023 - March 2024 will be released in the upcoming publication scheduled for 5th December 2024.

Nick Timothy:

[\[12770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what criteria the Prevent programme uses to (a) identify and (b) define subcategories of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism.

Dan Jarvis:

Prevent uses the definition of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism as set out in

CONTEST 2023. This describes those involved in Extreme Right-Wing activity who use violence in furtherance of their ideology. These ideologies can be broadly characterised as Cultural Nationalism, White Nationalism and White Supremacism. Individuals and groups may subscribe to ideological trends and ideas from more than one category.

When assessing referrals to Prevent, specialist police officers and staff determine

whether there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a person is at risk of radicalisation. According to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 S36(3) “ A chief officer of police may refer an individual to a panel only if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the individual is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism”

The definition used by Prevent is available at the following link: [Microsoft Word - English Standard CONTEST 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

■ Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe: [\[12489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many irregular migrants entered the UK in each of the last five years, broken down by vehicle type.

Rupert Lowe: [\[12574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many irregular migrants have crossed the Channel by (a) age and (b) sex in each year since 2018.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes statistics on irregular arrivals to the UK in the ‘Irregular migration to the UK statistics’ release on gov.uk. Data on arrivals by arrival method, sex, and age are published in table Irr_D01 of the [‘Irregular migration to the UK detailed datasets’](#), with the latest data up to the end of June 2024.

The Home Office does not publish arrival method breakdowns by vehicle type.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Boats

James McMurdock: [\[12623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help prevent the provision of large dinghies to people smuggling gangs.

Dame Angela Eagle:

We are taking a whole-of-system approach to disrupt and dismantle the people smugglers’ business model. This includes working with international partners upstream to intercept material used by these criminal gangs, including dinghies and engines.

On Monday 4th November, the Prime Minister set out his plans to INTERPOL for people-smuggling to be viewed as a global security threat and announced an additional £75 million to boost UK border security, bringing the investment in the Border Security Command over the next two years to £150 million. This will provide additional specialist investigators, intelligence officers, and state of the art surveillance equipment to ensure those behind this criminal activity are brought to justice.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what her department's policy is on (a) engines, (b) boats and (c) life jackets recovered from irregular migrant arrivals; and what the cost to the public purse was of the (i) storage of, (ii) destruction of and (iii) other process applied to such equipment in each year since 2018.

Dame Angela Eagle:

All vessels that have been subject to seizure are held by Border Force until completion of any criminal investigation activities. The majority of boats are not fit for re-sale or to ever go to sea again, as they arrive in very poor condition and may be damaged during the recovery process.

The boats are disposed of by Border Force's approved contractors and, where appropriate, any suitable materials are recycled. Regarding the costs of storage, destruction and other process applied to the equipment listed, this information is not available in an accessible format and can therefore not be provided.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Hotels

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether irregular migrants housed in hotels have access to (a) pool, (b) gym and (c) other hotel facilities.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation and subsistence support whilst their application for asylum is being considered.

They do not have access to hotel leisure facilities.

The Government is determined to restore order to the asylum system so that it operates swiftly, firmly and fairly, clearing the backlog and increasing removals, ending demand on accommodation. The Home Office accommodation estate is under constant review, as the Home Office continues to identify a range of options to minimise the use of hotels and ensure better use of public money.

■ Visas: Migrant Workers

Will Stone:

[\[12608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of dropping the salary requirement for people on visas employed by the Government.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Secretary confirmed on 30 July that we will be retaining the salary threshold increase brought in by the previous government. Further details can be

found in her Written Ministerial Statement here: [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).

■ Visas: Overseas Students

Chris Murray: [12499]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many study visas were issued to students studying at Scottish universities in 2023.

Chris Murray: [12500]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many study visas were issued to students studying at Scottish universities in 2022.

Chris Murray: [12501]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many study visas were issued to students studying at Scottish universities in 2021.

Chris Murray: [12502]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many work visas were issued for jobs in Scottish workplaces in 2023.

Chris Murray: [12503]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many work visas were issued for jobs in Scottish workplaces in Scotland in 2022.

Chris Murray: [12504]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many work visas were issued for jobs in Scottish workplaces in 2021.

Chris Murray: [12505]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many family visas were issued where the sponsoring (a) spouse or partner, (b) fiancé, fiancée or proposed civil partner, (c) child, (d) parent and (c) relative providing long-term care was resident in Scotland in 2023.

Chris Murray: [12506]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many family visas were issued where the sponsoring (a) spouse or partner, (b) fiancé, fiancée or proposed civil partner, (c) child, (d) parent and (c) relative providing long-term care was resident in Scotland in 2022.

Chris Murray: [12507]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many family visas were issued where the sponsoring (a) spouse or partner, (b) fiancé, fiancée or proposed civil partner, (c) child, (d) parent and (c) relative providing long-term care was resident in Scotland in 2021.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office publishes data on Family, Work, and Study visas granted in the [‘Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release’](#). However, this information is not broken down by place of residence or UK region.

The published statistics can be found in the [entry clearance visa](#) data tables.

Information on how to use the datasets can be found in the ‘Notes’ page of each workbook. The latest data relates to 2024 Q2.

James McMurdock:[\[12625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to ensure that student visas are not used solely to gain residence in the UK.

Seema Malhotra:

To obtain permission on the Student route prospective Students must demonstrate that they have a sufficient level of English, funds to maintain themselves, relevant qualifications, a genuine intention to study and be sponsored by a licensed college or university.

The Student route is a temporary immigration route and does not lead to settlement in the UK. There are no plans to change this. However, students may apply to extend their leave on other routes to remain in the UK provided they meet the requirements.

We continuously review and strengthen visa and compliance requirements on our study routes to ensure they best serve the UK and reflect the public’s priorities.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION**■ Parliament: Public Participation****Stuart Anderson:**[\[11910\]](#)

To ask the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps the Commission is taking to encourage participation in UK Parliament Week.

Nick Smith:

The Commission fully supports UK Parliament Week, the largest single public engagement campaign delivered by the UK Parliament.

This year, UK Parliament Week (18–24 November) will reach over two million people, who will take part in over 15,500 activities being organised by schools, youth organisations and community groups all over the UK, in British Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies, and many countries around the world. Every parliamentary constituency will host some form of UK Parliament Week activity.

UK Parliament Week activities are registered by the public via the UK Parliament Week website. Activities can take many forms. They have previously ranged from themed assemblies and meeting Members of Parliament to artistic and creative activities with a Parliament or democracy theme. All those who register activities are

sent either a printed or digital resource to help participants learn about Parliament. The resources include board games and quizzes aimed at school-aged learners.

The Commission invites all Members to participate in UK Parliament Week by encouraging constituents to sign up for events and activities that will help them learn more about the role of Members, the work that Members carry out both at Westminster and in their constituencies, and the importance of parliamentary democracy.

UK Parliament Week is delivered by the Participation team, Parliament's bicameral public engagement specialists.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Batteries: Storage

John Milne: [\[12901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to designate (a) Fire and Rescue services, (b) the Environment Agency and (c) the Health and Safety Executive as statutory consultees in the planning process for Battery Energy Storage Solutions.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [5520](#) on 11 October 2024.

■ Community Assets

Sarah Hall: [\[12558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on the number of Assets of Community Value (a) listed by each local authority and (b) rejected by each local authority in the last three years.

Sarah Hall: [\[12559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on the number of assets that were bought by community groups through the Community Right to Bid process since its introduction.

Alex Norris:

Information about Assets of Community Value listed by local authorities is held locally, and is not collected by central Government. The Government has committed to introducing a stronger Community Right to Buy through the English Devolution Bill, as part of which we are considering any changes to the Assets of Community Value process that are required to ensure the policy functions as effectively as possible.

■ Community Land Trusts

Edward Morello:

[\[11513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of providing more clarity to Local Plans and Design Codes in order for Community Land Trusts to develop land for their local communities.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government intends to introduce a package of plan-making reforms next year which will make the process of preparing local development plans clearer and more transparent, as well as making it easier for communities and stakeholders, including Community Land Trusts, to engage with it.

National design guidance already highlights the importance of community consultation in the preparation of design codes. To assist neighbourhoods in preparing their own codes the department have also supported Locality, a national membership network of local community organisations, including Community Land Trusts, providing specialist advice, peer learning and resources.

In addition, our recent consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework specifically included proposals designed to strengthen support for community-led housing, including changes to the size limit on community-led exception sites and a broadening of the definition of organisations able to deliver community-led housing. The consultation closed on the 24 September and officials in my department are currently analysing responses with a view to publishing a government response before the end of the year.

■ Elections: Visual Impairment

Sir John Hayes:

[\[12369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure that elections are accessible to (a) blind and (b) partially sighted people.

Rushanara Ali:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [10319](#) on 29 October 2024.

■ Embassies: China

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[12910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of alternative sites for the prospective relocation of the Chinese Embassy, aside from the proposed development in Tower Hamlets.

Matthew Pennycook:

Applications relating to the proposals for a new Chinese Embassy at Royal Mint Court have been called in for Ministers to decide. Calling in these applications should not be taken as any indication of views on the merits of the proposals.

An appointed Inspector will hold a public inquiry which will hear a range of evidence for and against the proposals, after which a decision will be made by MHCLG ministers. As this case will come before ministers in MHCLG to determine, it would not be appropriate to comment further.

■ Freeports: Economic Situation**James McMurdock:**[\[12634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of freeports on the economy.

Alex Norris:

As part of the monitoring and evaluation of the Freeports programme, MHCLG commissioned an initial analysis of the expected economic impact of Freeports based on the Full Business Cases submitted by Freeports and approved by the UK Government.

The analysis projected that the eight English Freeports would create around 60,000 new and additional jobs (net direct jobs) and support a further 42,000 jobs across the supply chain. This would support a total of around £6.6 billion additional GVA per year. Scottish Green Freeports and Welsh Freeports will be incorporated into this analysis once they have completed the business case process, and the initial analysis is being refined through more detailed modelling carried out by Cambridge Econometrics.

To date, Freeports have attracted £6.4 billion in private investment, which will create over 7,200 jobs. The impact of Freeports will be closely monitored and evaluated as set out in the Freeports [monitoring and evaluation strategy](#).

■ High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[12378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce delays to cladding remediation works.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG are committed to fulfilling the Government's ambition to accelerate the pace of remediation. We will work with partners across the construction and building safety sectors to make sure buildings are safer, faster. The Deputy Prime Minister is holding national roundtables to press home the urgency of this work and agree a joint plan for accelerating remediation.

The Recovery Strategy Unit is continuing to take action against the worst offenders to hold them to account in fixing their buildings and paying for remediation. We will set out our Remediation Acceleration Plan containing further steps this autumn.

■ Housing: Construction

Sir John Hayes: [\[12246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what external bodies her Department consulted before calculating revised housing targets.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government's proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, including the proposed new standard method for assessing housing needs, were informed by engagement with a wide range of stakeholders from across local government, the planning profession, and the development industry.

David Simmonds: [\[12276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 3.16 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, where the proposed locations are of the three large housing development sites in (a) Cambridgeshire, (b) West Sussex and (c) Durham; and how many houses will be built in each county.

Matthew Pennycook:

Information on the three housing development sites is as follows:

- a) Cambridgeshire: Permission for up to 1,000 new homes on land between Huntingdon Road and Histon Road, Cambridge, known as Darwin Green Phases Two and Three, was granted on 25 September 2024;
- b) West Sussex: A reserved matters application for 280 new homes at Kilnwood Vale, Crawley Road, Faygate, Horsham, was approved on 25 October 2024;
- c) Durham: Permission for up to 1,924 new homes at Sniperley Park and Sniperley Farm, Pity Me, Durham, was granted on 21 August 2024.

■ Parking: Fees and Charges

Andrew Rosindell: [\[12379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring all local authorities to provide drivers with the option of paying for parking by cash.

Alex Norris:

There is no guidance or legislation currently which specifies that local authority parking should be available in cash. However, all local authorities have statutory duties to ensure that they do not discriminate in their decision making against older people or those with vulnerabilities. Cash remains legal tender and it will continue to be used by people who favour its accessibility and ease. Local authorities should

ensure that there are alternative provisions for parking payments available so that no part of society is digitally excluded.

■ Social Rented Housing: Overcrowding

Alex McIntyre:

[\[12661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help tackle overcrowding in social housing in (a) Gloucester and (b) England.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my Hon Friend to my answer to Question UIN [11383](#) on 31 October 2024 that sets out the steps the government is taking to increase social and affordable housebuilding, which will help tackle overcrowding.

Local authorities, including Gloucester City Council, are responsible for allocating social housing through schemes managed locally. In doing so, they are governed by a framework set by central government which ensures that they must give 'reasonable preference' to specific groups, including people in overcrowded housing. Statutory allocations guidance also recommends local authorities consider giving 'additional preference' (high priority) to families in severe overcrowding which poses a serious health hazard.

■ Social Rented Housing: Repairs and Maintenance

Sarah Hall:

[\[12596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of setting national (a) standards and (b) timescales for repairs to social housing.

Matthew Pennycook:

All social homes should be decent, safe and warm. The government have committed to bringing forward the regulations necessary to introduce Awaab's Law in the Social Rented Sector, and to consulting on a new Decent Homes Standard and Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards early next year. We will set out an assessment of the costs and impacts of the relevant requirements alongside each consultation and subsequent consultation response.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Social Rented Housing

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12346\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many irregular migrants are in (a) social and (b) council housing.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer I gave to Question UIN [5689](#) on 11 October 2024.

JUSTICE**■ Domestic Abuse and Gender Based Violence: North Warwickshire****Rachel Taylor:****[13064]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to tackle violence against women and girls in North Warwickshire and Bedworth constituency; and if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the rate of prosecutions brought against perpetrators of domestic abuse in North Warwickshire.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The downward trend in domestic-abuse related prosecutions across England and Wales, including in Warwickshire and Bedworth, since the year ending March 2017 is deeply concerning. I am committed to working with all justice partners, including the police and the CPS, to improve this and, in doing so, provide justice to more victims and hold more offenders to account.

The Government was elected with a landmark mission to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) within a decade. In our first four months in Government, we have committed to fast-track rape cases through the criminal justice system and ban the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes. Further, we have announced that we will introduce domestic abuse experts in 999 control rooms from early next year and launch a pilot of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders this November to provide more protection for victims. These are just some of the first steps we are taking to tackle VAWG and improve the justice system response to domestic abuse across England and Wales.

■ Emergency Calls: Hoaxes and False Alarms**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:****[12752]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people were (a) prosecuted and (b) convicted for making hoax calls to the emergency services in each of the last five years.

Heidi Alexander:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on the number of defendants prosecuted and convicted, including for 'Improper use of public electronic communications network' which will include hoax calls. This can be obtained by using HO offence code 19607 in the Outcomes by Offences data tool, which can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2023](https://www.criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2023).

However, it is not possible to identify only those offences that involved making hoax calls to the emergency services. This information may be held on court records but to examine individual court records would be of disproportionate costs.

■ Nature Conservation: Crime

Rachel Gilmour:

[\[12867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will (a) hold discussions with the Sentencing Council on the adequacy of sentencing guidelines for people who have been convicted of wildlife crimes and (b) make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of the conviction rate for reported wildlife crime incidents.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Sentencing guidelines are developed by the independent Sentencing Council for England and Wales, in fulfilment of its statutory duty to do so, and the Council regularly assesses their effectiveness. It would not be appropriate for the Government to require the Council to develop or review particular guidelines.

The Government assesses and publishes the impact of its policies, including the impact on the Criminal Justice System, in a variety of ways including Impact Assessments.

■ Offenders: Rehabilitation

Mr James Frith:

[\[12476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department takes to support the reintegration of released prisoners.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Effective reintegration of prison leavers is a core part of our efforts to reduce reoffending, as it aims to ensure that the elements proven to reduce reoffending are in place when an offender leaves prison.

This includes making sure someone has a home, family links where appropriate, access to healthcare, a job or further education, and/or access to benefits. For example, to support a smoother transition into the community, we are delivering our temporary accommodation service so all offenders leaving prison at risk of homelessness are offered up to 12 weeks of accommodation to provide a stable base on release. To help ensure prisoners are matched to jobs on release, Prison Employment Leads, Employment Hubs, ID and Banking Administrators and Employment Advisory Boards are in every resettlement prison.

We will also ensure that pre-release plans are created for those leaving custody, to ensure their needs are identified early, and individual robust plans are in place to address resettlement needs.

■ Prison Sentences

Mr James Frith:

[\[12474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she plans to reform Imprisonment for Public Protection sentences.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

It is right that Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences were abolished. We supported reforms to the IPP licence in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 in opposition. They commenced on 1 November, which terminated the licence for around 1,800 IPP offenders in the community. The remaining reforms will be implemented on 1 February 2025.

The Government is determined to make further progress to support those serving the IPP sentence towards a safe and sustainable release, but not in a way that compromises public protection.

Prisons: Mental Health Services**Mr James Frith:**[\[12475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps her Department is taking to provide adequate mental health support for prisoners serving Imprisonment for Public Protection sentences.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

It is right that Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences were abolished. We are committed to working at pace to support the progression of all those serving the IPP sentence, but not in a way that undermines public protection.

We are committed to improving outcomes for offenders with mental health needs, including IPP prisoners, and recognise the importance of providing the right interventions at the right time.

This is reflected in the National Partnership Agreement on Health and Social Care in England which was published in 2023 and which sets out a shared priority workplan to deliver safe, decent and effective care for offenders in prison and the community.

Health and justice partners have committed to providing an equivalent standard, range and quality of healthcare in prisons to that available in the community. If a prisoner has a severe mental health need to an extent that detention under the Mental Health Act 1983 may be appropriate, they will be referred and assessed by qualified clinicians to determine whether to transfer to a mental health hospital is warranted.

Repossession Orders**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[12690\]](#)

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

Heidi Alexander:

To ensure increased and ongoing efficiency of County Court bailiff resources, HMCTS has introduced dedicated regional teams alongside an automated payment line to reduce the need for enforcement visits. This enables bailiffs to focus on priority

work, including evictions. HMCTS continues to carry out recruitment and retention activities to ensure sufficient bailiff resources are available.

■ **Television Licences: Non-payment**

James McMurdock: [\[12637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people were prosecuted for TV licence evasion in England in (a) 2022, (b) 2023 and (c) 2024.

Heidi Alexander:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on prosecutions for a wide range of offences, including TV licence evasion up to and including 2023 in the Outcomes by Offences data tool, that can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [Criminal justice statistics - GOV.UK](#).

This can be accessed by navigating to the 'Prosecutions and Convictions' tab and using the HO code filter to select the HO offence code '19101 – Television licence evasion' in the Outcomes by Offence Tool.

Data covering the 2024 calendar year is planned for publication in May 2025.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ **Broadband: Northern Ireland**

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[12918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Economy Minister on using Northern Ireland's ultra fast broadband capability to expand the business sector.

Hilary Benn:

Northern Ireland is leading the way for gigabit-capable broadband across the UK with over 90% coverage, made possible by substantial UK Government funding.

Digital connectivity is vital for stimulating economic growth, which is why the Chancellor has announced that the Government will be investing over £500 million in 2025-26 to drive the rollout of digital infrastructure across the UK, including in Northern Ireland.

■ **InterTrade UK**

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[12917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when the first meeting of InterTrade UK will take place.

Hilary Benn:

I confirmed the appointment of Baroness Foster as the chair of Intertrade UK on 19 September and work is continuing to appoint the remaining members of the body. We

will announce these appointments and further details - including the timing of the first and subsequent meetings - in due course.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Electronic Government

Jake Richards:

[\[12492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many Government services have moved to the GOV.UK One Login system; and what his planned timetable is for moving all Government services to this system.

Feryal Clark:

As of November 2024, users can access 50 government services within GOV.UK One Login. Approximately 100 services are expected to be onboarded in 2025, with more to follow thereafter. Government departments are actively developing delivery plans to onboard their services to GOV.UK One Login.

■ Musculoskeletal Disorders: Research

Ayoub Khan:

[\[12616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much funding his Department plans to provide for research into musculoskeletal treatments in each of the next five years.

Feryal Clark:

The Government does not generally ringfence funding for particular areas of research. In line with the Haldane principle, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and other Government funders award grants to the best proposals that are submitted through a process of expert peer review. UKRI delivers a substantial portfolio of researcher-led projects spanning understanding musculoskeletal biology through to the development of therapies for arthritis, pain, neuromuscular disease, and osteoporosis. The recent Budget set out DSIT's overall R&D funding, of £13.9bn for 2025/26. Further details regarding this funding allocation will be announced in due course, and before the start of the financial year.

■ Space Technology

Stephen Gethins:

[\[12969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to support the Scottish space sector; and whether his Department provides support for UK entities bidding for European Space Agency contracts.

Chris Bryant:

From 2018-2025, the UK Space Agency (UKSA) will have enabled and invested ~£126 million in Scotland through national programmes and European Space Agency (ESA) funding, including funding to establish launch services, co-funding for Space

Scotland, and funding via the Space Cluster Infrastructure Fund to expand access to key engineering infrastructure.

The UKSA supports the UK sector in bidding for ESA contracts through initiatives including ESA 101 courses and Bid Writing Workshops. Over 1,000 individuals from 558 different organisations have signed up to take part, equipping them with skills to enhance their ESA bidding success.

TRANSPORT

■ A47: Dual Carriageways

Terry Jermy: [\[12675\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will dual the A47 from Tilney to East Winch.

Lilian Greenwood:

There are currently no plans to dual the A47 from Tilney to East Winch, Norfolk. The performance of this section of the A47, and the wider A47 route, has been considered by National Highways as part of its interim East of England Route Strategy, and its investment requirements will form the basis of future network planning.

■ Active Travel: Regulation

Nesil Caliskan: [\[12908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of regulating micro-mobility modes of transport.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government recognises the depth of public concern about the question of regulation for micromobility.

As you will appreciate, the new Government is still in its early stages, and I am carefully considering next steps and potential policy solutions for micromobility.

■ Bus Services: Fares

Alex Mayer: [\[12531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when she plans to publish the final evaluation report on the £2 fare cap commissioned by her Department from Frontier Economics and SYSTRA.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department has published two interim reports setting out emerging trends in key outcomes from the first two months of the national bus fare cap scheme, and further updates will be provided in due course. These reports are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-2-bus-fare-cap>.

On Monday 28 October, the Prime Minister confirmed the government will introduce a new £3 cap on single bus fares from 1 January 2025 until the end of 2025. The £2 cap on single bus fares had been due to come to an end on 31 December 2024. This will be replaced by the £3 cap to help millions access better opportunities, and promote greater bus use by passengers.

■ **Cycling: Insurance and Vehicle Number Plates**

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[12376\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring cyclists to (a) display number plates and (b) hold valid insurance.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government has no intention of requiring all cyclists to display number plates or to have insurance. A national registration scheme for all cycles would be complex and expensive to design and administer.

As for insurance, the Government believes that this should remain a matter of personal choice. Some cyclists already have third party insurance via their membership of cycling organisations. Cyclists who are not insured are liable for the consequences of their actions should these result in injury or damages to others.

■ **Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**

Mr Toby Perkins:

[\[12934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many public electric vehicle charging points there are in each local authority area on (a) local authority land and (b) privately owned land.

Lilian Greenwood:

The information requested is not available. The Department for Transport does not hold information on whether the land on which a public charging device is located is (a) local authority land or (b) privately owned land.

The latest statistics on the number of public charging devices broken down by local authority can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electric-vehicle-public-charging-infrastructure-statistics-july-2024>.

■ **High Speed 2 Line: Compensation**

Sir Gavin Williamson:

[\[12936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many people have not yet been paid compensation for land and properties compulsorily purchased by HS2 Ltd.

Sir Gavin Williamson: [\[12937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many people in Staffordshire have not yet been paid compensation for land and properties compulsorily purchased by HS2 Ltd.

Lilian Greenwood:

Individual properties and claimants can have multiple active claims at any given time so data in the form requested is not available.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Euston Station

Dr Kieran Mullan: [\[12579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate she has made of the total cost to the public purse of extending HS2 from Old Oak Common to Euston Station.

Lilian Greenwood:

The government is considering a range of development models and financing mechanisms to best meet the objectives of the Euston area while delivering value for money for the taxpayer. Decisions around any further investment at Euston are for the second phase of the Spending Review.

■ P&O Ferries

Mr Richard Holden: [\[12484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to his the Prime Minister's comments on BBC Newscast on 12 October 2024, when did the Government's view on P&O change.

Mike Kane:

The Government has been working at pace to fulfil the commitments we made in opposition to improve workers' rights at sea. The Employment Rights Bill includes a measure to close a loophole by ensuring that the UK Government is notified of intended redundancies irrespective of a vessel's flag state.

We will also, via amendment during the bill's passage, introduce powers to allow the UK to strengthen workers' rights at sea and implement international conventions relating to seafarer employment. We have now laid regulations to implement the Seafarers' Wages Act so that from next month the National Minimum Wage equivalent will be paid.

■ Parking: Anti-social Behaviour

Matt Rodda: [\[13034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to tackle persistent nuisance parking on public highways.

Lilian Greenwood:

I fully understand concerns in relation to inconsiderate parking. The responsibility for traffic management generally rests with the appropriate local authority, including the provision or restriction of on-street parking, as they are best placed to consider how

to balance the needs of residents, emergency services, local business and those who work in and visit the area. Enforcement generally rests with the local authority; in a few places the police still have a role.

■ **Railway Stations: Access**

Pippa Heylings: [\[12546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans her Department has to continue funding for the Access for All programme.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government is committed to improving the accessibility of the railway and recognises the social and economic benefits this brings to communities. Since its launch in 2006, the Access for All (AfA) programme has delivered step free access at more than 250 stations across Great Britain.

Since April 2024, AfA projects have entered into passenger service at nine stations, with a further 25 stations scheduled to enter into passenger service by April 2025. We remain committed to further increasing the number of step free stations and are carefully considering our approach to identifying new AfA projects. I will of course ensure MPs and other stakeholders are kept informed about next steps.

TREASURY

■ **Agriculture: Inheritance Tax**

Tim Farron: [\[12406\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, what estimate her Department has made of the number of farms that will no longer be eligible for agricultural property relief.

James Murray:

The Government has published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at

www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms, and further explanatory information at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/what-are-the-changes-to-agricultural-property-relief>.

No changes are being made to the eligibility criteria for agriculture property relief. The system is being reformed to limit its generosity for claims over £1 million.

■ **Banking Hubs**

Adam Dance: [\[13096\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will increase the number of banking hubs due to be built in the next five years.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and is committed to championing sufficient access for all as a priority. This is why the Government is working closely with industry to roll out 350 banking hubs across the UK. The UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this parliament. Over 80 banking hubs are already open and Cash Access UK, who oversee banking hub rollout, expect 100 hubs to be open by Christmas.

The specific location of these hubs is determined independently by LINK, the operator of the UK's largest ATM network. Criteria that LINK considers includes whether another bank branch remains nearby, the local population, the number of cash-accepting businesses and the financial vulnerability of the community.

An alternative option for accessing face-to-face banking services in rural areas is via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework allows personal and business customers to withdraw and deposit cash, cash cheques, and check their balance at 11,500 Post Office branches across the UK.

■ Banks: North Warwickshire and Bedworth**Rachel Taylor:**[\[13062\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many high-street branches of (a) banks and (b) building societies have closed in North Warwickshire and Bedworth constituency since 2010.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government does not hold this information. However, the consumer group Which? finds that the North Warwickshire and Bedworth constituency has lost 71.4% of its branch network since 2015 and has four bank branches remaining.

The Government understands the impact of bank branch closures on communities and the importance of face-to-face banking. This is why the Government is working closely with industry to roll out 350 banking hubs across the UK. The UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this parliament. These hubs will provide small businesses and individuals who need face-to-face support with critical cash and in-person banking services. Over 80 banking hubs are already open and Cash Access UK, who oversee banking hub rollout, expect 100 hubs to be open by Christmas.

■ Beer: Excise Duties**Ben Maguire:**[\[12658\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 2.44 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC295, what the (a) territorial extent and (b) timetable is for the consultation on encouraging small brewers to retain and expand their access to UK pubs.

James Murray:

The government wants to work with the hospitality industry, including the pub sector, to identify the barriers to small brewers accessing their local markets – particularly where there is consumer demand, for example in tourist areas – and to look at options for overcoming those barriers.

The government will set out further details of any consultation in due course, as well as the territorial extend of any measures.

■ Business Rates: Northern Ireland**Claire Hanna:****[12605]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what Barnett Consequential have been calculated for the Northern Ireland Executive following the recent announcement of additional rates support for (a) retail, (b) hospitality and (c) leisure in the Autumn Budget 2024.

Darren Jones:

As a result of decisions taken at the Autumn Budget, the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) is receiving £18.2 billion in 2025-26, including an additional £1.5 billion Barnett consequentials.

The NIE's settlement for 2025-26 delivers a real-terms increase and is the largest in real terms of any settlement since devolution. The NIE is funded above its independently assessed relative level of need of 124% in both 2024-25 and 2025-26, including the 2024 restoration financial package.

The Block Grant Transparency publication, which sets out changes to devolved government funding in detail, will shortly be updated with changes made at Autumn Budget 2024. The most recent document was published in July 2023:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/block-grant-transparency-july-2023>

■ Business: Inheritance Tax**Victoria Atkins:****[12741]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her Department's publication entitled Summary of reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief, published on 30 October 2024, how many Agricultural Property Relief claims in the reference period also included claims for Business Property Relief.

James Murray:

The Government has published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at

www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

In 2021-22, 782 estates making agricultural property relief claims also made business property relief claims.

■ Business: Money**Rupert Lowe:**[\[12573\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information her Department holds on the number and proportion of businesses that do not accept cash; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of taking steps to require all businesses to accept cash.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government recognises the vital role cash plays as means of payment for essential goods and services and to the wider economy, and welcomes the recent announcement of the Treasury Select Committee's inquiry into cash acceptance.

There is no legal requirement for businesses to accept specific forms of payment. It is for each business to decide on the forms of payment it chooses to accept, based on a variety of factors, including cost and customer preferences. Research published by the Financial Conduct Authority in 2020 found that 98 per cent of small businesses surveyed would never turn customers away if they needed to pay in cash.

The Financial Conduct Authority also recently assumed regulatory responsibility for protecting access to cash. These rules will support business' ability to continue to accept cash by ensuring they have reasonable access to cash deposit facilities.

■ Employers' Contributions: Civil Society**Alison Taylor:**[\[12571\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to employer National Insurance contribution rates on third sector organisations; and whether she plans to take steps with Cabinet colleagues to provide additional funding to charities to support them with these costs.

James Murray:

The Government recognises the important role charities play in our society, and has made it a priority to develop a Civil Society Covenant recognising the sector as a trusted and independent partner.

Within the tax system, we provide support to charities through a range of reliefs and exemptions, including reliefs for charitable giving. The tax reliefs available to charities are a vital element in supporting charitable causes across the UK, and our tax regime for charities is among the most generous of anywhere in the world with more than £6 billion in charitable reliefs provided to charities, CASCs and their donors in 2023 to 2024. The biggest individual reliefs provided are Gift Aid at £1.6 billion and business rates relief at nearly £2.4 billion.

To repair the public finances and help raise the revenue required to increase funding for public services, the government has taken the difficult decision to increase employer National Insurance.

The Government recognises the need to protect the smallest businesses and charities, which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to

£10,500, meaning more than half of employers with NICs liabilities either gain or see no change next year. Charities will still be able to claim employer NICs reliefs including those for under 21s and under 25 apprentices, where eligible.

The Government has committed to provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer NICs costs only. This is the usual approach the Government takes to supporting the public sector with additional Employer NICs costs, as was the case with the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy.

■ Employers' Contributions: Government Departments

Dr Caroline Johnson: [\[12948\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much funding she has budgeted (a) overall and (b) for each Department to reimburse them for the increased costs they incur from the rise in employers national insurance contributions.

Darren Jones:

The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance Contributions costs only. This funding will be allocated to departments, with the Barnett formula applying in the usual way.

This is in line with the approach taken under the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy.

As set out in the Autumn Budget, the Government has set aside £4.7 billion in 2025-26 and plans to update Parliament on allocations by department in the usual way as soon as possible.

■ Employers' Contributions: Wales

David Chadwick: [\[12653\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many businesses in Wales will benefit from changes to employment allowance.

James Murray:

Estimates of the number of businesses in Wales that will benefit from changes to the Employment Allowance announced at Autumn Budget 2024 are not available.

■ Equity Release: Misrepresentation

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[13095\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many cases of mis-sold Equity Release schemes have been referred to the Financial Ombudsmen in the last two years.

Tulip Siddiq:

This is a matter for the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS), which is an independent, non-governmental body. The FOS will respond to the Honourable Member by letter, and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

■ Imports: Companies

Lee Barron: [\[12674\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to help protect British businesses in (a) the hobby sector and (b) other sectors from (i) TEMU and (ii) other cheap import companies.

James Murray:

Under the UK's Low Value Imports Regime, consignments valued below £135 can be imported into the UK without incurring customs duty. This is a common provision in customs regimes around the world designed to avoid disproportionate burdens on low value trade. All overseas retailers that sell goods from abroad to UK consumers are subject to VAT at the same rates as domestic businesses. We keep the operation and impact of our policies relating to imports under review. The Government is committed to working in partnership with businesses to deliver sustained economic growth.

■ Living Wage

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[12915\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11832 on Living Wage, how many and what proportion of workers affected by the increase in the National Living Wage will become taxpayers in April 2025.

James Murray:

At Autumn Budget the Chancellor announced the National Living Wage will rise by 6.7% in April 2025 to £12.21 per hour, representing a pay rise to over 3 million workers. This pay boost is worth £1,400 a year for an eligible full-time worker.

The Government is protecting working people's payslips by, not increasing the basic, higher or additional rates of income tax, or employee National Insurance contributions. It is also not extending the freeze on personal tax thresholds, allowing them to rise with inflation from April 2028.

■ Mobility Scooters: Import Duties

Adam Dance: [\[13097\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the revenue raised by the ten percent tariff imposed on the import of mobility scooters.

James Murray:

Mobility scooters that are imported into the UK are classified under the description of 'Vehicles specially designed for travelling on snow, golf cars and similar vehicles'. The commodity code for this classification is 8703101800. There is a customs duty tariff rate of 10% on imports for this commodity code.

Analysis of management information shows around £6m of customs duty liabilities was recorded for commodity code 8703101800 in 2023/24. This estimate applies to

all types of vehicles imported under this commodity code and is not specific to Mobility Scooters only.

■ **Office for Value for Money**

Sarah Olney:

[\[12455\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of the potential impact of the Office for Value for Money on Government expenditure in each of the next three financial years.

Darren Jones:

The Office for Value for Money has two primary roles. First, to provide targeted interventions, working with Treasury and departments, so that value for money governs every decision government makes. Second, to recommend system reforms to ensure any changes support the government's missions and deliver value for money.

The Office for Value for Money will be a time-limited team. Following the conclusion of the Spending Review, the Office will evaluate the effectiveness of systems reforms, and its impact on the wider spending architecture.

Sarah Olney:

[\[12456\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has set a target for the impact of the Office for Value for Money on Government expenditure in each of the next three financial years.

Darren Jones:

The Office for Value for Money has two primary roles. First, to provide targeted interventions, working with Treasury and departments, so that value for money governs every decision government makes. Second, to recommend system reforms to ensure any changes support the government's missions and deliver value for money.

The Office for Value for Money will be a time-limited team. Following the conclusion of the Spending Review, the Office will evaluate the effectiveness of systems reforms, and its impact on the wider spending architecture.

■ **Office for Value for Money: Staff**

Sarah Olney:

[\[12454\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many staff in the Office for Value for Money have a salary over £100,000.

Darren Jones:

The Office for Value for Money has one member of staff with a salary of over £100,000. This is within the pay range for Senior Civil Service Directors across government.

■ Pensions: Inheritance Tax

John Glen:

[\[12389\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 2.51 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, what her Department's policy is on the application of inheritance tax to (a) unused pension funds and (b) death benefits in relation to the (i) Ministerial and (ii) Civil Service Alpha pension schemes after April 2027.

James Murray:

As announced at Autumn Budget 2024, unused pension funds and death benefits payable from a pension will form part of a person's estate for inheritance tax purposes from 6 April 2027.

These reforms impact on inherited sums arising from both defined contribution and defined benefit schemes. Both the Civil Service Alpha scheme and the Ministerial Pension Scheme are discretionary schemes, which means that lump sum death benefits paid from these schemes would previously not have formed part of a person's estate for inheritance tax purposes.

As a result of these reforms, from 6 April 2027, lump sum death benefits paid from these schemes will form part of a person's estate for inheritance tax purposes.

It is worth noting that non-discretionary defined benefit schemes, such as the NHS, are already within the scope of inheritance tax.

■ Private Education: Employers' Contributions and VAT

Damian Hinds:

[\[12393\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of the costs of (a) VAT, (b) employers' National Insurance contributions, (c) employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme and (d) business rates for independent schools on the number of children educated in the (i) independent and (ii) state sectors.

Damian Hinds:

[\[12697\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of increases in employers' National Insurance contributions on (a) cost pressures for independent schools and (b) the number of children leaving the independent school sector; and whether the figures included in HM Revenue & Customs policy paper entitled, Applying VAT to private school fees, published on 30 October 2024, took account of proposed increases in employers' National Insurance contributions.

Damian Hinds:

[\[12698\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make a comparative estimate of the average cost of (a) VAT, (b) employers' National Insurance contributions, (c) contributions to the Teachers' Pensions Scheme and (d) business rates for independent schools that

are (i) liable for business rates for the first time and (ii) already liable for business rates (A) before and (B) after the Autumn Budget 2024.

James Murray:

The government publishes Tax Information and Impact Notes (TIINs) for tax policy changes when the policy is final or near final. TIINs give a clear explanation of the policy objective together with comprehensive assessment of the impacts on individuals and families, businesses and the wider economy, equalities impacts, and any other specific area of impact. TIINs look at the impacts of changes to the tax system separately for each measure.

A TIIN assessing the impacts of applying VAT to private school fees has been published online and can be found here: [Private school fees — VAT measure - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/private-school-fees-vat-measure).

Details of the changes to business rates charitable rate relief and changes to employer National Insurance contributions (NICs) were outlined at Budget. Notes on the general impacts of these measures will be published in due course alongside the respective legislation when it is introduced to Parliament.

■ **Public Sector: Pay**

John Glen:

[\[12414\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's letter to the Senior Salaries Review Body of 30 September 2024, whether public sector pay rises will be linked to productivity improvements in financial year 2025-26.

Darren Jones:

Pay for most frontline workforces are set through an independent Pay Review Body (PRB) process. The independent PRBs, including the Senior Salaries Review Body, provide evidence-based advice to the government on levels of pay, taking account of a range of factors including the need to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified people and the financial circumstances of the government.

As set out in the Autumn Budget, Departmental settlements for 2025-26 will need to fund the next round of public sector pay awards. Departments will set out their affordability evidence to the PRBs in the usual way, taking account of expected inflation over the next financial year, forecast by the OBR to be 2.6%. If the PRBs recommend pay awards above the level departments have budgeted for, the Government will have to consider the justification – for example where there are especially acute recruitment and retention demands, or where productivity improvements can unlock further funding.

■ **Revenue and Customs: Correspondence**

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[12671\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking with HMRC to help ensure taxpayers receive prompt responses to queries.

James Murray:

HMRC recognise that their service levels have been below published standards, and they are committed to improving customer service performance.

To improve their services and meet published standards, HMRC are deploying additional customer service advisers this year. They expect to meet their post and telephone service standards in the second half of 2024-25.

HMRC are investing in digital services and the HMRC. These can often provide customers with faster resolutions for straightforward matters.

■ Russia: Freezing of Assets**Calum Miller:**[\[12845\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the amount of Russian assets held by sanctioned individuals in the UK; and how much and what proportion of those assets have been recovered.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), part of HM Treasury, announced in December that £22.7 billion in Russian Assets has been reported as frozen as of October 2023. This figure is provided in aggregate so as not to disclose the value of any funds held by particular designated persons and is a cumulative total of assets reported.

An asset freeze does not involve a change in ownership of the frozen funds or economic resources, nor are they transferred to HM Treasury. Any interest accrued on these assets is subject to the asset freeze, to be frozen immediately by the person in possession or control of them.

■ Stamp Duty Land Tax: First Time Buyers**Peter Fortune:**[\[12583\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the number of first-time buyers in London that may be subject to stamp duty from April 2025, in the context of proposed changes to the rate of stamp duty relief.

James Murray:

Statistics on the number of claimants of First Time Buyers' Relief on Stamp Duty Land Tax by region of England are included within Table 9 of the 'UK Stamp Tax statistics' publication available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-stamp-tax-statistics>. The most recent data covers the financial year 2022 to 2023.

Regional projections of the number of first-time buyers subject to Stamp Duty Land Tax are not available.

■ Stamp Duty Land Tax: Greater London

Peter Fortune: [\[12584\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the total revenue her Department expects to receive from property purchases in London following proposed changes to the rate of stamp duty relief.

James Murray:

Statistics on total revenue raised from Stamp Duty Land Tax by region of England for previous years are available within Table 3a of the 'UK Stamp Tax statistics' publication available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-stamp-tax-statistics>. The most recent data covers the financial year 2022 to 2023.

Regional projections of total revenue from property purchases are not available.

■ Treasury: Ministers' Private Offices

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[9057\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items this was spent.

James Murray:

The department has spent £2.6k on new furniture, fittings, and other refurbishment since the dissolution of the last Parliament. This spending includes the installation of an exhibition in Number 11 Downing Street from the National Maritime Museum, office furniture, fittings and maintenance.

■ UK Trade with EU

Clive Jones: [\[12538\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of leaving the European (a) Union, (b) Customs Union and (c) Single Market on (i) imports and (ii) exports.

James Murray:

The OBR has estimated the difference in level of imports and exports had the UK not withdrawn from the EU. That estimate is available at this link: [OBR Economic and fiscal report March 2021](#). The most recent report is the [Economic and fiscal report October 2024](#). Additional OBR Economic and fiscal reports can be found [here](#).

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Access to Work Programme: Arthritis****Ayoub Khan:**[\[12617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether the Connect to Work scheme will include provisions to support people living with arthritis to remain in employment.

Alison McGovern:

Connect to Work will be a new, locally led, voluntary Supported Employment programme in England and Wales which in 26/27 will support around 100,000 disabled people, people with health conditions (such as arthritis) and those with complex barriers to employment to get into as well as remain in work.

Local Authorities are designing their own local Connect to Work programmes, working within national guidance. There will be a phased roll out, led by Local Authorities' own timetables. We expect to see local areas opening for Connect to Work referrals in the spring and summer of 2025.

■ Advisory Services: Older Workers**David Chadwick:**[\[12655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has undertaken an evaluation of the Mid-life MOT initiative.

David Chadwick:[\[12809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has undertaken an evaluation of the Mid-life MOT initiative.

Alison McGovern:

The Midlife MOT is designed to help individuals in their 40s and 50s to stay in and return to work. Midlife MOT sessions are delivered through Jobcentre Plus for Universal Credit claimants aged 50+. The research on these sessions is currently ongoing and will be published upon completion.

The Private Sector Midlife MOT pilots were delivered through providers, direct to employees, in three pilot areas (the North East of England; Cornwall and Devon; and East Anglia). These pilots have now ended. Evaluation of the pilots was the responsibility of the programme providers individually. DWP also conducted in-house research as part of a wider evaluation strategy.

The Digital Midlife MOT website, providing access to financial, health and career guidance, is open to all and website analytics are continuously monitored. Further research into the Digital MOT website is ongoing and will be published upon completion.

■ Employment Schemes

Natasha Irons:

[\[12812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of the policies to be set out in the Get Britain Working white paper on the number of people who will be supported back into work in each region.

Alison McGovern:

The Government is publishing a Get Britain Working White Paper setting out reforms to employment support to help tackle the elevated level of economic inactivity, support people into good work, and create an inclusive labour market in which everybody can participate and progress in work. These reforms are driven by a long-term ambition to reach an 80% employment rate and to reduce the UK's inactivity rate back to pre-pandemic levels.

The White Paper will build on manifesto commitments including fundamental reform for DWP through a new service to support more people into work and help them get on in work, including through an enhanced focus on skills and careers; local Get Britain Working Plans for areas across Britain to set out how economic inactivity will be tackled at a local level, led by Mayors and local areas; and a Youth Guarantee for all people aged 18 to 21 in England, to ensure they have an offer of education, training or help to find work.

Through the Autumn Budget, £240 million funding has recently been announced for the White Paper measures and will help us deliver and build on these labour market reforms to Get Britain Working.

■ Employment: Disability

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[12375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to encourage employers to hire people with disabilities.

Alison McGovern:

Employers are crucial in enhancing employment opportunities and supporting disabled people and those with health conditions to thrive in the workforce. Our forthcoming employment White Paper explores ways to improve employment outcomes and experiences for these groups.

Current support to employers includes the Disability Confident scheme which provides advice, support, and free resources to help employers attract, recruit, retain and develop disabled people in the workplace. The scheme encourages employers to think differently about disability and to take positive action to address the issues disabled employees face in the workplace. As of the 31 October 2024 there are over 19,000 employer members of the scheme and they report over 12 million employees working in their organisations.

At a local level, as part of their duties, Disability Employment Advisers promote, collaborate and advocate for our customers and department services, such as the Disability Confident scheme, with external partners, service providers and employers.

Nationally, DWP Strategic Relationship Team work with Disability Confident employers to demonstrate actively how they are bringing their Disability Confident commitments to life as part of their recruitment arrangements.

Current support to employers also includes [a digital information service for employers](#) which offers tailored guidance on supporting health and disability in the workplace.

■ Employment: Musculoskeletal Disorders

Ayoub Khan: [\[12618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether the new Get Britain Working Trailblazers will help support people with musculoskeletal conditions to remain in employment.

Alison McGovern:

We plan to publish the Get Britain Working White Paper shortly that will set out how we are investing £240 million to trial new ways of getting people back into work. The government will test new approaches and collect robust evidence on how to tackle the root causes of ill-health related inactivity, support young people who are 'not in education, employment or training' and help people to develop their careers.

In at least three areas the NHS will also be receiving funding to develop evidence of the impact of targeted action on those top health conditions most associated with economic inactivity including musculoskeletal conditions, mental health and cardiovascular disease. Once established, the government will work closely with local areas to develop the support they will provide to local communities.

■ Food Poverty

Kim Johnson: [\[12482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has made an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of surveys undertaken by the Food Foundation Food entitled Food insecurity tracking, published in July 2024, on a potential link between ethnicity and food insecurity.

Alison McGovern:

We are committed to tackling poverty in all its forms and this includes tackling food insecurity by reducing mass dependence on emergency food parcels. Good work can significantly reduce the chances of people falling into poverty so will be the foundation of our approach.

The Child Poverty Taskforce has started urgent work to publish the Child Poverty Strategy in Spring 2025. We will harness all available levers across government to bring about an enduring reduction in child poverty in this parliament, as part of a 10-year strategy for lasting change.

Our jobcentres support our customers, including in ethnic minority groups, to move into employment by providing access to mainstream services and bespoke programmes that are designed to be flexible to individual needs. We are also taking targeted action in 20 places with a high ethnic minority employment gap. The Get Britain Working White Paper, to be set out in the Autumn, will develop measures to reduce inactivity and help people to find better paid and more secure jobs.

Alongside this, we have committed to reviewing Universal Credit by listening to the full range of views on potential changes, so that our social security system is fit for purpose. As announced in the Autumn Budget, a new Fair Repayment Rate will be introduced from April 2025, reducing Universal Credit deductions overall cap from 25% to 15%. This measure will help approximately 1.2 million of the poorest households benefit by an average of £420 a year.

We also announced that, £1 billion, including Barnett impact, will be invested to extend the Household Support Fund in England by a full year until 31 March 2026, on top of the six months already announced, and to maintain Discretionary Housing Payments in England and Wales.

■ Habitual Residence Test

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12868\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11207 on Habitual Residence Test, how many habitual residence tests related to Universal Credit assessments have been granted in each of the last five years.

Andrew Western:

The table below gives the number of Universal Credit (UC) Habitual Residence Test (HRT) assessments that resulted in a 'pass' decision in the past five years.

DATE DECISION ENTERED ON ADMIN SYSTEM	NUMBER OF UC HRT 'PASS' DECISIONS
April 2019 to March 2020	381,000
April 2020 to March 2021	918,000
April 2021 to March 2022	1,046,000
April 2022 to March 2023	555,000
April 2023 to March 2024	533,000
April 2024 to September 2024	322,000

Source: DWP internal analysis of UC Dataworks tables)

Notes:

- The Habitual Residence Test (HRT) is nationality blind. It is applied to British citizens returning from abroad to check for factual habitual residency in the UK, as well as to foreign nationals to check they have an immigration status permitting access to public funds and that they are factually habitually resident.
- All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand decisions.
- An individual may have multiple HRT assessments.
- These figures are not Official Statistics. These figures stem from administrative data and represent the best estimates using current methodologies and assumptions about the data. Future improvements in methodology may lead to different subsequent estimates.
- Figures are for the UK.

■ Household Support Fund: Gloucester

Alex McIntyre:

[12657]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the extension of the Household Support Fund in 2025-26 on low-income households in Gloucester.

Alison McGovern:

No assessment has been made on the potential impact of the extension of the Household Support Fund in 2025-26 on low-income households in Gloucester.

We are currently conducting an evaluation of the Household Support Scheme that ran from April 2023 to March 2024, to understand the benefits of the awards made across England during this period. This will be published in due course.

Management information on the Household Support Fund from April 2023 to March 2024, including details of how funding was spent in Gloucestershire, of which Gloucester is a part, is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-4-management-information-for-1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024>.

■ Jobcentres: St Neots

Ian Sollom:

[13084]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of opening a jobcentre in St Neots.

Alison McGovern:

The Department for Work and Pensions continually keeps under review the location of Jobcentres across Great Britain to balance customer demand and the range of services required, while also providing value for money for the taxpayer. There are no plans to expand the Jobcentre Plus network at this time.

When shaping Jobcentre services, DWP uses local insights to develop plans which account for the needs of communities to access employment support. Support for St

Neots is currently available from Huntingdon and Cambridge Jobcentres, both of which are located nearby.

■ **National Insurance: Bulgaria and Romania**

Richard Tice: **[12846]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many National Insurance Numbers were issued to (a) Bulgarian and (b) Romanian nationals in Boston and Skegness constituency in each year since 2021.

Andrew Western:

The Department publishes quarterly statistics on [National Insurance number allocations to adult overseas nationals entering the UK](#) on Stat-Xplore. The latest statistics, for January 2002 to June 2024, can be compiled by [rolling year end to June](#) and [nationality](#) down to country level, and are available by Westminster parliamentary constituency (based on the address given at time of National Insurance number registration).

Users can log in or access [Stat-Xplore](#) as a guest and, if needed, can access [guidance](#) on how to extract the information required.

■ **Pension Credit**

Adrian Ramsay: **[11991]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what information her Department holds on average waiting times for decisions on (a) offline and (b) digital Pension Credit applications.

Emma Reynolds:

We are unable to provide Pension Credit average waiting times for decisions separately for offline and digital claims. Average Actual Clearance Times are measured weekly. The table below shows Average Actual Clearance Times (AACT) from the end of week commencing 2nd September to the end of week commencing 21st October, in working days.

DWP currently works to a planned timescale of 50 working days to clear Pension Credit claims.

SOURCE		02/09/24	09/09/24	16/09/24	23/09/24	30/09/24	07/10/24	14/10/24	21/10/24
Winter Fuel Payment Dashboard	Pension Credit Claims AACT	26	26	26	25	33	37	44	52

Please note.

- The data shown is unpublished management information, collected and intended for internal departmental use and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard.
- These figures will not align to previous PQ responses due to retrospective updates as the data is sourced from live systems.

Sarah Olney:

[\[12742\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many claims for pension credit there were from 28 October 2024 to 4 November 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

Data on how many Pension Credit applications made between 1 April 2024 and 22 September 2024 was recently published on gov.uk, [Weekly Pension Credit claims received from 1 April 2024 to 22 September 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

On 28 October 2024, The Department [announced](#) updated Pension Credit applications and award statistics will be published on 28 November 2024. This publication will provide application volumes after 22 September 2024.

■ State Retirement Pensions

Alex McIntyre:

[\[12656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the average increase in the State Pension in each of the next five years.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government has committed to uprating the basic and new State Pensions by the Triple Lock for the length of this parliament.

Based on OBR Autumn 2024 forecasts, over the course of this parliament, the full yearly rate of the new State Pension will go up by around £1,900. At the same time, the full yearly rate of basic State Pension is forecast to increase by around £1,500.

Table A.3 of the Economic Fiscal outlook sets out the OBR's economic and fiscal forecasts in each year, including the Triple Lock uprating forecast which is the rate at which basic and new State Pension is increased by for the following financial year. For example, the 2024-25 rate will determine the rate of increase for basic and new State Pension for the year 2025-26.

FORECAST YEAR	'TRIPLE-LOCK' GUARANTEE
2024-25	4.0%*
2025-26	4.3%
2026-27	2.5%
2027-28	2.5%

FORECAST YEAR	'TRIPLE-LOCK' GUARANTEE
2028-29	2.5%
2029-30	2.5%

* Note: After the forecast was finalised, inflation and earnings outturn data and revisions were released which have changed state pension triple lock rate for 2024-25 (to be used in uprating for 2025-26) to 4.1 per cent.

■ State Retirement Pensions: British Nationals Abroad

Ayoub Khan:

[\[12874\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support British state pensioners residing overseas.

Emma Reynolds:

UK State Pensions are payable worldwide, without regard to nationality, based on a person's National Insurance record. People move abroad for many reasons and may have access to their host country's benefit system or other sources of income such as an occupational pension.

Information about the impact on State Pensions of moving abroad is available on Gov.uk.

Ayoub Khan:

[\[12875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of uprating the state pension for British pensioners residing overseas.

Emma Reynolds:

No assessment has been made.

The UK's policy on the up-rating of the UK State Pension for recipients living overseas is a longstanding one. The UK state pension is payable worldwide without regard to nationality and is uprated abroad where we have a legal requirement to do so, for example in countries with which we have a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating.

Up-rating is based on levels of earnings growth and price inflation in the UK which has no direct relevance where the pensioner is resident overseas.

Over many years, priority is given to those living in the United Kingdom when drawing up expenditure plans for additional pensioner benefits.

Steve Darling:

[\[13057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support British pensioners residing overseas.

Emma Reynolds:

UK State Pensions are payable worldwide, based on a person's National Insurance record, and are only uprated abroad where there is a legal requirement to do so, for example in countries with which we have a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating.

People move abroad for many reasons and may have access to their host country's benefit system or other sources of income such as an occupational pension.

Information about the impact on State Pensions of moving abroad is available on Gov.uk.

Tracy Gilbert:[\[13081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support British pensioners residing overseas.

Emma Reynolds:

UK State Pensions are payable worldwide, based on a person's National Insurance record and are only uprated abroad where there is a legal requirement to do so, for example in countries with which we have a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating.

People move abroad for many reasons and may have access to their host country's benefit system or other sources of income such as an occupational pension.

Information about the impact on State Pensions of moving abroad is available on Gov.uk.

Tracy Gilbert:[\[13082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to uprate the state pension for British pensioners residing overseas.

Emma Reynolds:

The UK's policy on the up-rating of the UK State Pension for recipients living overseas is a longstanding one. The UK State Pension is payable worldwide and is only uprated abroad where there is a legal requirement to do so, for example in countries with which we have a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating.

Over many years, priority is given to those living in the United Kingdom when drawing up expenditure plans for additional pensioner benefits.

Angus MacDonald:[\[13364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential financial impact of uprating the pensions of British pensioners overseas whose state pensions are currently frozen.

Emma Reynolds:

No assessment has been made.

The UK's policy on the up-rating of the UK State Pension for recipients living overseas is a longstanding one. The UK State Pension is payable worldwide and is

updated abroad where we have a legal requirement to do so, for example in countries with which we have a reciprocal agreement that provides for up-rating.

Up-rating is based on levels of earnings growth and price inflation in the UK which has no direct relevance where the pensioner is resident overseas.

Over many years, priority is given to those living in the United Kingdom when drawing up expenditure plans for additional pensioner benefits.

■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

Ian Byrne:

[\[13014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman entitled Women's State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, published on 21 March 2024, HC 638, if she will establish a compensation scheme for affected women by 5 February 2025.

Emma Reynolds:

We are reviewing the Ombudsman's report along with the evidence provided during the investigation.

We need to consider the views that have been expressed on all sides including the points raised by representatives from the WASPI Campaign who I met recently, the first Government Minister to do so for 8 years.

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

■ Universal Credit: Migrants

Rupert Lowe:

[\[12870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many recipients of Universal Credit were born outside the UK in each of the last five years.

Andrew Western:

The Department does not collect data on the country of birth of individuals claiming Universal Credit.

DWP policy responsibility lies in establishing a customer's eligibility to claim benefits. An individual's specific country of birth does not play a role in this and the Department therefore does not collect the country of birth information at the point of a Universal Credit claim.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Launch of Youth Strategy

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy): [\[HCWS210\]](#)

The Government is today announcing the development and co-production of the National Youth Strategy. Young people's needs have never been more complex. Through this Strategy, we will improve our understanding of young people's priorities as well as run an ambitious and wide consultation.

In the coming months this consultation will feed into a report, *Today's Youth, Tomorrow's Nation*, detailing young people's priorities to inform our new approach. The National Youth Strategy will be published next year.

Through this strategy we will better coordinate youth services, as well as move away from one-size-fits all approaches from government, bringing power back to young people and their communities and rebuilding a thriving and sustainable sector.

Given our ambition, we will be winding down the National Citizen Service programme from the end of the financial year and the National Citizen Service Trust when parliamentary time allows. All necessary processes will be followed including engagement with Parliament and His Majesty The King.

The Government is grateful for the valuable contribution of every member of NCS staff and Board members, past and present, as well as for the contributions of young people who have engaged with the NCS programme and with the Trust all those years. We will work closely with the NCS Trust to ensure there is an orderly transition from the end of the NCS programme to what comes next.

The Government has announced that, in 2025/26, it will increase the total funding for other DCMS youth programmes to ensure young people can continue to access opportunities, no matter where they are from. This includes funding for the Local Youth Transformation pilot to support local authorities to build back lost capability and improve youth offers. We will also allocate over £85 million of capital funding in 2025/26, including launching the £26 million Better Youth Spaces fund and completing the Youth Investment Fund projects.

In addition to this government funding, £100 million of Dormant Assets funding will be dedicated to youth outcomes over 2024 to 2028.

This will drive the transition to a future in which young people have choices and chances and local communities are empowered to support a generation to succeed.

EDUCATION

■ Department for Education Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Guarantee

Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities (Bridget Phillipson): [\[HCWS202\]](#)

I am today laying before both Houses a Departmental Minute on the use of a contingent liability by the Department for Education to provide a Local Government Pension Scheme guarantee to Further Education providers operating in the statutory sector.

The Department for Education Further Education Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Guarantee is a government commitment to fund pension deficits in the event of a closure and where the provider's reserves are insufficient to fund their own LGPS deficit upon closure.

We expect LGPS administering authorities to recognise the Crown guarantee provided by the Further Education Guarantee in their funding strategies, setting employer contribution rates and deficit recovery periods.

A full Departmental Minute has been laid in both Houses providing more detail on this contingent liability.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ The UK's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution emissions reduction target under the Paris Agreement

Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): [\[HCWS206\]](#)

On Tuesday 12 November at the 29th UNFCCC conference of the parties (COP29) in Baku, the Prime Minister will announce the UK's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the [Paris Agreement](#). This will commit the UK to reducing economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% by 2035, compared to 1990 levels, excluding emissions from international aviation and shipping.

The 2035 NDC is based on [advice](#) from the independent Climate Change Committee (CCC). It is a clear progression on the UK's previous NDC pledging to reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030. It was informed by the outcomes of the Global Stocktake from COP28 and is aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5 °C. It is aligned with the level of ambition in Carbon Budget 6 (2033-37) on the pathway to net zero by 2050.

The headline target will be followed by submission of the detail underpinning the NDC – known as Information to facilitate Clarity, Transparency and Understanding (ICTU) – to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ahead of the February 2025 deadline. A copy of the ICTU will be laid in the Houses of Parliament.

The UK's early and ambitious NDC will help restore our global climate leadership and encourage greater ambition from other countries. It is one important part of the UK's overall contribution to global emissions reductions, alongside our International Climate Finance and other support.

Globally, the world is way off track from meeting the Paris Agreement temperature goal. Climate action must be accelerated drastically to reduce emissions and keep the annual average global temperature rise below 1.5°C. The ambition and delivery of the next round of NDCs, due to be submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by February 2025 and implemented in the 2030s, will be critical in enabling this.

The UK's domestic action is the first crucial step to restoring UK international leadership on Climate Change. The clean energy transition is also the economic opportunity of the 21st century and will support the creation of hundreds of thousands of good jobs across the UK, protect our economy from future price shocks, while delivering a range of social and health benefits.

That is why making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the five missions of this Government - delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero across the economy.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Reforms to The Bathing Water Regulations 2013

Minister for Water and Flooding (Emma Hardy):

[\[HCWS207\]](#)

Our water system urgently needs fixing. There have been repeated failures for the public and record levels of sewage polluting our rivers, lakes and seas. This must be stopped. Fundamental reform of the water sector is underway but will not happen overnight. This Government is committed to reforming the system, so it works for the public, and is taking further steps to restore our rivers, lakes and seas to good health.

Bathing waters, as set out in The Bathing Water Regulations 2013, are designated coastal or inland waters that are used by large numbers of people for bathing. Bathing waters are one of the most visible ways in which the public interacts with the water environment. They are local assets that bring social and health benefits to communities, and it is critical that the regulations around bathing waters meet the fundamental needs of the public, and those managing bathing water sites.

We recognise that the way the public interacts with bathing waters has changed, driven by the increasing popularity of wild swimming and other water-based activities.

That is why today, Defra, jointly with the Welsh Government, is launching a consultation on a package of reforms to The Bathing Water Regulations 2013. These proposed changes to bathing water rules will prioritise public safety and water quality so more people can enjoy our rivers, lakes and seas throughout the seasons. The proposed reforms will modernise the system to meet the needs of the public, including removing strict automatic de-designation, taking water quality and public safety into account when applications for new bathing waters are assessed, and removing the fixed dates of the bathing season from the Regulations to allow for a more flexible approach to monitoring, extending the dates of the bathing season where necessary to better reflect when people use bathing waters. The purpose of the Regulations is to ensure the protection of public

health through the use of monitoring and classifications. It is the Government's intention to pursue an increase in the designation of safe bathing water sites.

Defra is also seeking both public and stakeholder views on expanding the definition of bathers to include participants in water sports other than swimming, to encompass all who use bathing sites, as well as views on the introduction of multiple testing points at each bathing water. This is to gather initial views for potential longer-term considerations.

Proposed technical amendments will also bring legislation in line with modern best practice, allowing the Environment Agency to improve ways of working and improve delivery for the public.

The consultation will run this winter with a Government response to be published in the new year.

Alongside these reforms, the Government is working on other major changes to the water system. The Water (Special Measures) Bill will deliver on the Government's commitment to put water companies under special measures, strengthening the powers of the regulators to ensure that water companies – and their executives – are firmly held to account for wrongdoing. The regulators will also be able to recover costs for a much greater range of enforcement activities.

An Independent Commission into the water sector and its regulation was also launched on 23 October - the largest review of the industry since privatisation. This Commission forms the next stage in the Government's long-term approach to ensuring we have a sufficiently robust and stable regulatory framework to attract the investment needed to clean up our waterways, speed up infrastructure delivery and restore public confidence in the sector. The Commission will provide overarching recommendations on transforming how our water system works and cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas for good. The Bathing Water Reforms will tackle a discrete and technical part of the current framework.

It is through these reforms that we can begin to regain public trust, fix the system, and restore our rivers, lakes and seas for current and future generations to enjoy.

HOME OFFICE

■ Home Office contingent liability regarding accommodation provision under the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011

The Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis):

[\[HCWS203\]](#)

I have today laid before the House of Commons a Departmental Minute concerning a new uncapped contingent liability for the Home Office. The liability relates to Home Office approved accommodation for use by individuals subject to Terrorism Prevention Investigation Measures (TPIM) orders. This contingent liability will enable the Home Office to secure appropriate accommodation for such cases. Failure to secure accommodation for TPIM subjects may result in unacceptable risks to national security. These are risks I am not willing to take.

The need for the liability arises due to the limited information that the Government can share with housing suppliers when securing properties for individuals subject to TPIMs and the potential implications for the validity of insurance covering the relevant properties.

Treasury guidance on managing public money requires that Parliament be notified of any novel contingent liabilities. In normal circumstances, notification would be made when Parliament is in session, however due to the urgency in this case, the liability was made during the period when Parliament was in recess. I am satisfied that this course of action was necessary in the circumstances.

HM Treasury has approved this liability. In the unlikely event the liability was to be called, provision for payment would be sought through the contract with the supplier.

A full departmental minute has been laid before the House of Commons providing more detail on this contingent liability.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Housing Design and Quality

Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): [\[HCWS209\]](#)

The government are committed to building 1.5 million new homes over the next five years, but we have also been clear that increasing housebuilding rates cannot mean units at any cost. We want exemplary development to be the norm not the exception so that more communities feel the benefits of new development and welcome it. As we act to boost housing supply, we are therefore determined to take steps to improve the design and quality of the homes and neighbourhoods being built.

These guiding principles are woven into the fabric of the reforms we have initiated over recent months. The New Towns Taskforce, for example, has been asked to ensure that quality and design are integral to its agenda, and it has been explicitly tasked with setting out clear principles and standards for new large-scale communities to ensure they are well-connected, sustainable, well-designed, and attractive. Our proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework also highlighted the government's ongoing commitment to well-designed homes and places, and retaining the objective of creating high-quality, beautiful, and sustainable buildings and places.

My department intends to update the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code in Spring next year, and we will continue to bolster design skills and capacity through the £46 million package of capacity and capability support provided to local planning authorities. This will be used to fund the recruitment and training of 300 graduate and apprentice planners, along with the £1 million funding to Public Practice for the recruitment of planners, architects and urban designers.

Together, this framework provides a clear basis for the delivery of more high-quality, well-designed homes. To help support this delivery, in particular as we progress our consideration of large-scale sites and large-scale new communities, I intend to establish

quarterly Steering Boards on design and placemaking, ensuring that our work is guided by those with relevant professional and practical expertise.

It was announced in July 2023 that the Office for Place, previously a small team in the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, would become an arm's length body to be based in Stoke-on-Trent. Work to establish the Office has continued since then. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the interim board, led by Nicholas Boys Smith as chair, and the Office for Place team for their exemplary work on this important issue. In putting design and quality at the heart of the housing supply agenda and establishing the principles of design coding and embedding them in practice across the planning and development sectors, Nicholas and the team have made a significant contribution.

Alongside spending decisions taken at the Budget and the re-setting of departmental budgets, the Deputy Prime Minister and I have, however, concluded that support to improve the quality and design of new homes and places can be more efficiently and effectively delivered by the Department itself. The Office for Place will therefore be closed down and the expertise of its staff redeployed within the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), across the country. I would like to reassure the House that this will not impact on wider government commitments to Stoke-on-Trent, including the award of £19.8 million for their Levelling Up Partnerships programme.

In taking the decision to wind up the Office for Place, the government is not downgrading the importance of good design and placemaking, or the role of design coding in improving the quality of development. Rather, by drawing expertise and responsibility back into MHCLG, I want the pursuit of good design and placemaking to be a fully integrated consideration as the government reforms the planning system, rolls out digital local plans and provides support to local authorities and strategic planning authorities. I also believe that embedding this work within MHCLG will allow experience to be better reflected in decision-making, as well as integrated within an existing delivery team in Homes England already focused on design and placemaking.

It will also ensure continuity of current Office for Place key activities, including support for Pathfinder authorities who received a share of £1 million to produce exemplar design codes, alongside work on digital design codes and funding to support local and regional urban design best practice and skills.

The government regards improving the design and quality of the homes and neighbourhoods we will build over the coming years as conducive to, rather than in tension with, our ambition to significantly increase housing supply, and we have put in place the necessary policy and delivery framework to ensure we deliver on both objectives.

■ Local Government Best Value

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon): [\[HCWS204\]](#)

I have previously updated this House that this Government is committed to resetting the relationship between local and regional government, and to establish partnerships built on mutual respect, genuine collaboration and meaningful engagement. Never is this more important than when individual councils face governance challenges. We are keen to work with local authorities to support focus on recovery and reform. It is imperative that all councils are fit, legal and decent. There must be a clear and deliverable plan in place to address problems where these have been identified to protect the interests of local taxpayers. In that context, I would like to update the House on the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

It is a matter of public record that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was subject to statutory intervention under section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999 (“the 1999 Act”) between December 2014 and September 2018. This followed an inspection by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP which identified best value failure, particularly in relation to grant making, property disposal and publicity spending. Commissioners were withdrawn and functions returned to the Council in March 2017 on the condition that it continued to achieve against its best value plans and report regularly to the Secretary of State on its on-going compliance with the Best Value Duty. In response to a corporate peer review by the Local Government Association in June 2018, which concluded the Council was now “on a positive trajectory”, Ministers took the decision to end the intervention in September 2018.

Following evidence that suggested recent changes to the Council’s governance arrangements may have the potential to undermine past improvements that had allowed the intervention to end, on 22 February 2024 the then Secretary of State (the Rt Hon. Michael Gove), commissioned an inspection of the Council’s compliance with its Best Value Duty. He appointed Kim Bromley-Derry CBE DL as Lead Inspector, along with Suki Binjal, Sir John Jenkins and Philip Simpkins as Assistant Inspectors, and asked them to report their findings to him by 31 May 2024. On 24 May, following the announcement of the General Election, this deadline was extended to 31 July. The Inspectors completed their Inspection and submitted their Report to the Secretary of State and, as statute requires, provided a copy to the Council.

The Report identifies several positive features at the Council, such as the finance service and the enthusiasm shown by officers and members for serving the Borough. It also notes that the Council has already taken steps to make improvements, including in response to the Local Government Association’s Corporate Peer Challenge Report of September 2023. However, the Report documents serious concerns across a number of areas which I considered against its Best Value Duty under Part 1 of the 1999 Act:

- On Leadership : The Report concludes that a lack of respect and co-operation between political parties prevents Councillors from engaging in a culture of genuine improvement. A lack of trust has contributed to officer churn at the top few levels of the organisation. Inspectors also found insufficient challenge of the Executive and a perception among many staff that “many good managers had left the organisation as a result of ‘speaking truth to power’”.
- On Governance : The Report paints a picture of an organisation with a clear drive and mandate to deliver the Mayor’s priorities, but for whom due process is often treated as an obstacle to priorities rather than as a necessary check and balance. The Inspectors consider the Council’s scrutiny culture to be “weak and confused”, and the level of challenge “inadequate”.
- On Culture : The Report concludes that the entire organisation is impacted by a lack of trust, with the Administration “suspicious and defensive in its behaviour”. The culture appears to be one where decisions are taken based on advice from a small number of people who are trusted by the Mayor and has been described by many staff and partners as “toxic”. A culture of patronage, even if not at play in every appointment, is perceived as pervasive enough to undermine trust between members, staff and leadership, as well as with external stakeholders.
- On Partnerships and Community Engagement : While the Report notes the strong community focus of the Mayor, Councillors and wider Council, it concludes how the “significant time and energy” spent in local communities “seems to distract from their critical and statutory strategic relationships”. Inspectors found a lack of co-production and joint planning undertaken by the Council and saw insufficient evidence that the Council undertook meaningful and comprehensive consultation with key partners, staff, and service users before decisions were taken in some key areas.
- On Continuous Improvement : While the Council has made targeted and concerted improvements over the last two years, this has lacked a strategic focus or a cultural prioritisation of continuous improvement. The culture set and exemplified by the leadership is to reactively respond and counter criticism rather than honestly appraise and self-improve. On some issues, the Inspectors are sceptical of the Council’s capability to self-improve.

I have carefully considered the Report and other relevant material and am satisfied that the Council is failing to comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the 1999 Act, namely it is failing to comply with its Best Value Duty in relation to Continuous Improvement, Governance, Leadership, Culture and Partnerships. I am therefore minded to exercise powers of direction under section 15(5) of the 1999 Act in relation to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to secure its compliance with the Best Value Duty. I believe, given the evidence of serious concerns in the Report, a broad and supportive intervention package, with robust external assurance, is necessary and expedient for the Council to secure compliance with this Duty. To that end, and in line with procedures laid down in the 1999 Act, I have today (12 November 2024) written to the Council asking them to make

representations – if they wish – both on the Inspection Report and on the statutory support package that I am now proposing.

This proposed statutory support package, to be in place for an initial period of three years, is designed to strengthen and expand the improvement work that the Council has already begun. It acknowledges the political mandate the Mayor holds, whilst recognising the need to tackle deeply rooted and persistent issues. It recognises the constructive engagement I have had with the Council and acknowledges that they stand ready to work in partnership with Government to deliver the change needed for local people. It also recognises that the Council has some corporate capacity to address the challenges identified in the Report and has already put in place some of the building blocks for continuous improvement and will help to ensure that the Council remains in a stable financial position.

This approach balances the evidenced need for government support, with the desire to work constructively so that we see sustained improvement. A core element of the proposed support package will be the reconfiguration and strengthening of the Council's Transformation Advisory Board to provide external expertise, challenge and advice to the Council. I am proposing directing the Council to work with Ministerial Envoys to reconfigure its existing Board into a Transformation and Assurance Board, and to draw on existing and additional members to appoint independent and external Leads for Leadership, Governance and Culture & Partnerships; all areas where the Council is currently failing. I am also proposing directing the Council to appoint at least two opposition councillors to the Board and for the Mayor to continue his role as Chair. The Council will be required to report to this Board on the delivery of its Continuous Improvement Plan every three months or at such intervals as the Board may require. The Council will also be required to have regard to and respond promptly in public to any recommendations from the Board with respect to the Council's improvement work.

In order to assist the Council to achieve the necessary improvements, I am minded to appoint a Ministerial Envoy and Assistant Envoy to act as advisor, mentor and monitor to the Council, and to oversee its improvement work. The Ministerial Envoys will work comprehensively within the Council to oversee the proposed changes to the Board, including agreeing its scheme of work and meeting agendas, preparation of the Council's Continuous Improvement Plan and an open recruitment exercise to appoint a permanent lead for the Council's improvement work. They will attend meetings, provide ad hoc advice and challenge, and be available to Senior Leadership for support. They will also work closely with the Board Leads for Governance, Leadership and Culture & Partnerships to ensure the realisation of comprehensive programmes of cultural change and political mentoring. I am proposing directing the Council to cooperate with the Ministerial Envoys, and to allow them all reasonable access to their premises, documents, employees or members in support of their work.

I would like the Ministerial Envoys to report on the Council's progress against its improvement agenda after the first four months, and then regularly as we agree is appropriate. Their assessment will provide the assurance local residents, strategic partners and I need to ensure the Council's compliance with its Best Value Duty.

I will carefully consider any representations the Council and other interested parties make and decide how to proceed. If I decide to intervene in the manner described here, I will then make the necessary statutory directions under the 1999 Act and appoint the Ministerial Envoys. Any directions that I make will be without prejudice to making further directions, should this prove necessary.

This action is not undertaken lightly, and I am committed to working in partnership with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to provide whatever support is needed to ensure its compliance with the Best Value Duty and the high standards of governance local residents and service users expect. I hope with focus and oversight that improvement will come at pace, but I will not hesitate to consider further action and escalation if necessary, in the interests of Tower Hamlets residents. I will deposit in the House library copies of the Report and letter I have referred to, which are also being published on gov.uk today. I will update the House in due course.

TREASURY

■ Notification of Contingent Liability

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):

[\[HCWS208\]](#)

The independent Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Bank of England (“the Bank”) decided at its meeting ending on 3 February 2022 to reduce the stocks of UK government bonds and sterling non-financial investment-grade corporate bonds held in the Asset Purchase Facility (APF) by ceasing to reinvest maturing securities. The Bank ceased reinvestment of assets in this portfolio in February 2022 and commenced sales of corporate bonds on 28 September 2022, and sales of gilts acquired for monetary policy purposes on 1 November 2022. The sales of corporate bonds ceased on 6 June 2023, with a small number of outstanding corporate bonds reaching maturity on 5 April 2024. Therefore, the APF is now comprised solely of gilts.

The Chancellor at the time agreed a joint approach with the Governor of the Bank of England in an exchange of letters on 3 February 2022 to reduce the maximum authorised size of the APF for asset purchases every six months, as the size of APF holdings reduces.

Since 30 April 2024 when the maximum authorised size of the APF was last reduced, the total stock of assets held by the APF for monetary policy purposes has fallen further from £704.2 billion to £654.5 billion. In line with the approach agreed with the Governor, the authorised maximum total size of the APF has therefore been reduced to £654.5 billion, comprising entirely of gilts.

The risk control framework previously agreed with the Bank will remain in place, and HM Treasury will continue to monitor risks to public funds from the APF through regular risk oversight meetings and enhanced information sharing with the Bank.

There will continue to be an opportunity for HM Treasury to provide views to the MPC on the design of the schemes within the APF, as they affect the Government’s broader economic objectives and may pose risks to the Exchequer.

The Government will continue to indemnify the Bank, the APF and its directors from any losses arising out of, or in connection with, the facility. Provision for any payment due under the liability will continue to be sought through the normal supply procedure.

A full departmental Minute has been laid in Parliament providing more detail on this contingent liability.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ **Completing the Implementation of Universal Credit**

Minister of State (Minister for Social Security and Disability) (Sir Stephen Timms):
[\[HCWS205\]](#)

This government is committed to getting Britain working. Completing the implementation of Universal Credit will support this mission. Universal Credit provides greater support and incentives to get people into work and increase the hours they work than the benefits it replaces.

Move to UC statistics published today show that, by the end of September, the department had, since 2022, notified 943,343 households of the need to make the transition to UC. The latest published complaints data show that as of March 2024 with over 500,000 households asked to move to UC, DWP had only 35 complaints about the process, with 10 upheld. Plans have now been agreed to notify the remaining households receiving income related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), building on the insight that DWP has gathered through the summer. This insight, and the learnings from scaling the move to Universal Credit for all legacy benefit customers, will be published by the end of 2024.

DWP is investing up to a further £15m in Help to Claim to support Employment and Support Allowance customers moving to Universal Credit. This means that free confidential and impartial support will continue to be available to help people make a new Universal Credit claim and manage their claim, up to receiving their first correct payment.

DWP will steadily increase the number of migration notices being sent to people receiving ESA over the next months and are aiming to issue 63,000 migration notices each month from February, sending the final notices in early December 2025 and fully moving people to Universal Credit and closing legacy benefits by the end of March 2026.

As DWP moves into this final phase for Move to UC, it will make the transition from delivering 'Move to UC' from a Programme-led approach to a 'business as usual' operation. I am therefore announcing today the intention to formally close the Move to UC Programme by the end of March 2025, as the work of the Programme will be complete by then.

My department will continue to work closely with stakeholders throughout this transition and under the new operating model. It will also publish all the remaining UC Programme Board papers in April 2025 when the Programme closes.

This has been a major undertaking for DWP. As the department heads towards such a significant milestone, I would like to thank officials who have delivered this transformational reform, and I would also like to thank all MPs and external stakeholders who have shared their insight and expertise to make this process work for those we are supporting and realise this transformation fully.