



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 27 November 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:33 P.M., 27 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	8		
ATTORNEY GENERAL	8		
■ Attorney General: Buildings	8	■ Cabinet Office and Prime Minister: Travel	14
■ Hate Crime: Internet	8	■ Cabinet Office: Parliamentary Private Secretaries	14
■ Stalking: Convictions and Prison Sentences	8	■ Cabinet Office: Staff	14
■ Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill	9	■ Civil Servants: Pay	15
■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure	9	■ Civil Servants: Trade Union Officials	15
BUSINESS AND TRADE	10	■ Civil Servants: Workplace Pensions	15
■ Bicycles: Imports	10	■ Civil Service	16
■ Department for Business and Trade: Federation of Small Businesses	10	■ Civil Service: Equality	16
■ Food: Norfolk	11	■ Commercial Organisation Remuneration Committee	17
■ Foreign Investment in UK: South Norfolk	11	■ Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals	17
■ Post Offices	11	■ Contracts for Services: Trade Unions	17
■ Post Offices: Closures	12	■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices	18
■ Small Businesses: Finance	13	■ Government Departments: Directors	18
■ Trade Agreements	13	■ Government Departments: Disclosure of Information	18
CABINET OFFICE	13	■ Government Departments: ICT	19
■ 10 Downing Street: Alcoholic Drinks	13		
■ 10 Downing Street: Art Works	13		
■ Business: Meetings	14		

■ Government Departments: Incentives	20	■ Veterans: Age	28
■ Honours: Public Appointments	20	■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure	28
■ NHS: Staff	20	EDUCATION	29
■ Office for National Statistics: Civil Servants	21	■ Breakfast Clubs: Special Educational Needs	29
■ Prime Minister: Communication	21	■ Children in Care	29
■ Prime Minister's Office: Vacancies	21	■ Church Schools: Academies	31
■ Procurement: National Security	22	■ Educational Psychology: Labour Turnover and Recruitment	32
■ Public Appointments	22	■ Foster Care	32
■ Senior Civil Servants: Pay	22	■ Free School Meals: Departmental Coordination	33
■ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015	22	■ Health Education: Allergies	34
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	23	■ Nurseries: Employers' Contributions	35
■ Cricket and Football: Sportsgrounds	23	■ Ofsted: Inspections	35
■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Local Government Association	23	■ Pre-school Education: Employers' Contributions	36
■ Leisure Centres: Energy	23	■ Primary Education: Food	36
■ Leisure: Finance	24	■ Private Education: VAT	37
■ Press Freedom	24	■ Special Educational Needs	37
DEFENCE	24	■ Special Educational Needs: Finance	38
■ Ajax Vehicles	24	■ Special Educational Needs: Staffordshire	38
■ Armed Forces Compensation Scheme	25	■ Teachers Pensions	39
■ Armed Forces: Cadets	25	■ Truancy	40
■ Armed Forces: Training	26	ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	41
■ Defence: Research	27	■ Biofuels: Subsidies	41
■ HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark: Decommissioning	27	■ Community Energy: Finance	41
■ HMS Devonshire	27	■ Energy Supply: Nature Conservation	41
■ Nuclear Weapons	27	■ Energy: Billing	42
		■ Energy: Housing	42

■ Fuel Poverty: Runcorn and Helsby	42	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	54
■ Great British Energy	43	■ China: Taiwan	54
■ Offshore Industry: Training	43	■ Development Aid	55
■ Renewable Energy	44	■ Development Aid: Climate Change	55
■ Renewable Energy: International Cooperation	44	■ Gaza: Israel	56
■ Sizewell C Power Station: Compensation	44	■ Iran: Women	56
■ Solar Power	45	■ Israel and Occupied Territories: Crime	57
■ Solar Power: Bournemouth East	46	■ Laos: Christianity	57
■ Solar Power: Development Consent Orders	46	■ Occupied Territories: Human Rights	57
■ Wind Power: Seas and Oceans	46	■ Pakistan: Political Prisoners	58
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	47	■ Singapore and Taiwan: Cybersecurity	59
■ Air Pollution	47	■ Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief	59
■ Flood Control: Land Drainage	48	■ Taipei Representative Office in the UK	60
■ Horses: Exports	48	■ Undocumented Migrants	60
■ Marine Environment: Per- and Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances	49	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	60
■ Marine Protected Areas: Norfolk	49	■ Accident and Emergency Departments	60
■ Pesticides	50	■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Standards	60
■ Plastics: Consumption and Production	50	■ Ambulance Services: Private Sector	61
■ Plastics: Recycling	50	■ Ambulance Services: Standards	61
■ Plastics: Treaties	51	■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Drugs	62
■ Reservoirs: Havant	51	■ Carer's Allowance	64
■ Rivers: Pollution	53	■ Cervical Cancer: Screening	64
■ Water Companies: Employers' Contributions	53	■ Coeliac Disease: Gluten-free Foods	64
■ Water: Standards	53	■ Dentistry: Lincolnshire	65

■ Doctors: Pay	65	■ NHS: Translation Services	77
■ Down's Syndrome	65	■ North Devon Hospital	78
■ Endometriosis: Health Education	66	■ Nurses	78
■ Euthanasia	67	■ Nurses: Students	79
■ Health Services: Digital Technology	67	■ Nurses: Universities	79
■ Health Services: Disability	68	■ Pectus Excavatum: Surgery	80
■ Health Services: Foreign Nationals	68	■ Physician Associates: Finance and Incentives	80
■ Health Services: Hertfordshire	68	■ Physician Associates: Training	81
■ Health Services: Leeds	69	■ Protective Clothing: Storage	81
■ Hospital Beds: Foreign Nationals	69	■ Radioisotopes	82
■ Hospitals: Grants	70	■ Respiratory Diseases	82
■ Independent Healthcare Providers Network: Correspondence	70	■ Respiratory Diseases: The Wrekin	82
■ IVF: Asylum	71	■ Tuberculosis: Vaccination	83
■ Liver Diseases	71	■ Vaccination: Children	83
■ Medical Records	72	■ Ventilation: Public Places	84
■ Medical Treatments	72	HOME OFFICE	84
■ Medical Treatments: Undocumented Migrants	72	■ Asylum: Hotels	84
■ Mental Health Services: Finance	73	■ Crime: Rural Areas	85
■ Mental Health Services: Neurological Diseases	73	■ Domestic Abuse: Carers and Parents	85
■ Mental Health Services: Rural Areas	73	■ Freight: Organised Crime	85
■ Midwives: Students	74	■ Lincolnshire Police: Translation Services	86
■ NHS: Buildings	75	■ Missing Persons	86
■ NHS: Disease Control	75	■ National Rural Crime Network	87
■ NHS: Finance	76	■ Non-crime Hate Incidents: Lincolnshire	87
■ NHS: Migrant Workers	76	■ Security Industry Authority: Staff	87
■ NHS: Take-up	76	■ Sexual Offences: Nationality	88
		■ Sexual Offences: Victim Support Schemes	88

■ Undocumented Migrants: Housing	88	■ United Kingdom	100
■ Visas: British National (Overseas)	89	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY	100
■ Visas: Digital Technology	89	■ 5G: Romford	100
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	90	■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Buildings	100
■ Building Safety Fund and Cladding Safety Scheme	90	■ Digital Technology: Gloucester	101
■ Buildings: Fire Prevention	91	■ Project Gigabit: Romford	101
■ Business Rates	91	■ Research: Finance	101
■ Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission	92	■ Social Media: Young People	102
■ Civil Disorder: Rural Areas	92	SCOTLAND	102
■ Community Housing: Older People	93	■ Bus Services and Railways: Scotland	102
■ Council Tax	93	TRANSPORT	103
■ Council Tax: Greater London	94	■ Bus Services: Concessions	103
■ Garden Communities: Sittingbourne	95	■ Bus Services: Cornwall	103
■ General Election 2024: Proof of Identity	95	■ Bus Services: North of England	103
■ Homelessness: Finance	96	■ Bus Services: Solihull	104
■ Local Government Finance	96	■ Driving Tests	105
■ Local Government: Employers' Contributions	97	■ High Speed 2 Line: Complaints	106
■ Property Management Companies: Competition	97	■ Manchester Airport: Parking	107
JUSTICE	98	■ Motorways: Safety	107
■ Offenders: Electronic Tagging	98	■ Motorways: South West	108
■ Prisons: Repairs and Maintenance	98	■ Railways: Chichester	108
■ Sexual Offences: Victim Support Schemes	99	■ Railways: Ticket Offices	109
NORTHERN IRELAND	99	■ Roads: Staffordshire	109
■ Transport: Northern Ireland and Scotland	99	TREASURY	109
		■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax	109
		■ Alcoholic Drinks: Excise Duties	111
		■ Banks and Building Societies: Closures	112
		■ Business Rates	113

■ Business Rates and Council Tax: Valuation	113	■ Homelessness: Temporary Accommodation	122
■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances	113	■ Local Government: St Neots	122
■ Children's Play: VAT	114	■ Multiple Births	123
■ Council Tax: Wales	115	■ Personal Independence Payment	123
■ Cryptocurrencies	115	■ Social Security Benefits: EU Nationals	124
■ Defibrillators: VAT	116	■ Social Security Benefits: Foreign Nationals	125
■ Departmental Coordination	116	■ Social Security Benefits: Overpayments	125
■ Development Aid	116	MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS	127
■ Employers' Contributions: Public Houses	117	DEFENCE	127
■ Financial Services: UK Trade with EU	117	■ Military Aircraft: Helicopters	127
■ Government Departments: Communication and Consultants	118	HOME OFFICE	127
■ Help to Buy Scheme: Individual Savings Accounts	118	■ Asylum: Health Services	127
■ Office for Value for Money	119	WRITTEN STATEMENTS	128
■ Property: Valuation	119	CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	128
■ Public Expenditure	119	■ Statutory gambling levy and stake limit for online slots	128
■ Retail Trade: Business Rates	119	EDUCATION	131
■ Taxation: Domicil	120	■ Breakfast Club Early Adopters	131
■ Taxation: International Cooperation	120	HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	131
■ Treasury: Public Appointments and Special Advisers	121	■ Epigenetics	131
■ VAT: Fraud	121	HOME OFFICE	132
WORK AND PENSIONS	121	■ Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Order launch	132
■ Department for Work and Pensions: Staff	121	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	133
		■ Veterans' Access to Social Housing	133

Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Attorney General: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[15036\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, pursuant to the Answer of 25 October 2024 to Question 9603 on Attorney General: Buildings, how many individual desks were occupied in her Department's HQ office in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available; and how many staff assigned to that HQ workplace attended the office in person on average in the same period.

Sarah Sackman:

The Attorney General's Office (AGO) is based in one location in London, at 102 Petty France. For the period 28 October to 22 November 2024, an average of 27 desks were occupied. For the same period, 57 civil servants were assigned to work at the AGO and on average 27 members of staff attended the office in person at any one time (this figure does not take account of annual leave, sickness, attending training or other government buildings).

■ Hate Crime: Internet

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14344\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the Crown Prosecution Guidance on the definition of online hate speech in the context of protecting freedom of speech.

Sarah Sackman:

The Government is committed to tackling all forms of hate crime, and ensuring that police and prosecutors can spend their time dealing with the issues that matter most to our communities.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has existing guidance on communications offences. As with all guidance, they keep that guidance under regular review. This guidance explains the relevant law and how the CPS applies that law, including to offences committed online which constitute hate crime. It includes clear protections and provisions for the fundamental right of freedom of speech.

■ Stalking: Convictions and Prison Sentences

Jim Shannon:

[\[14611\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the conviction rate for the offence of stalking; and if she will have discussions with the Secretary of State for Justice on increasing the maximum sentence for that offence.

Sarah Sackman:

This Government is committed to tackling stalking as part of our ambitious mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade.

Since 2017, there have been yearly increases in the number of stalking offences charged which proceeded to a first hearing in the magistrates' courts. In 2018/19, there were 2,208 such cases, and in 2023/24, they more than doubled to 5,859. However, more can be done.

In April 2023, the CPS amended prosecutorial guidance on stalking which has assisted prosecutors to better select the appropriate charge.

Earlier this month and in partnership with the National Police Chiefs' Council, I welcomed the CPS' Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan, which aims to improve the way that cases are prosecuted and handled. Stalking features prominently in the plan, which applies to all forms of stalking, and is captured within high-harm, high-risk repeat offending.

The Government has also delivered on a manifesto commitment to launch an Independent Review of Sentencing, chaired by former Lord Chancellor David Gauke, to bring sentencing up to date and ensure the framework is consistent and clear to victims and the public.

■ Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill**Helen Grant:**[\[14962\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, if she will make an assessment of whether the restriction of the application of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill to terminally ill patients is compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Sarah Sackman:

Paragraph 21.27 of Erskine May states:

“By long-standing convention, observed by successive Governments, the fact of, and substance of advice from, the law officers of the Crown is not disclosed outside government. This convention is referred to in paragraph [5.14] of the Ministerial Code [updated on 6 November 2024]. The purpose of this convention is to enable the Government to obtain frank and full legal advice in confidence.”

This is known as the Law Officers' Convention and it applies to your question.

■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure**Sir John Hayes:**[\[14915\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, if she will make a comparative assessment of the testimony given to the High Court during *AB and others v. Ministry of Defence (2009)* and records released by the Atomic Weapons Establishment relating to nuclear test veterans in May 2024.

Sarah Sackman:

Paragraph 21.27 of Erskine May states:

“By long-standing convention, observed by successive Governments, the fact of, and substance of advice from, the law officers of the Crown is not disclosed outside government. This convention is referred to in paragraph [5.14] of the Ministerial Code [updated on 6 November 2024]. The purpose of this convention is to enable the Government to obtain frank and full legal advice in confidence.”

This is known as the Law Officers’ Convention and it applies to your question.

BUSINESS AND TRADE**■ Bicycles: Imports****Chi Onwurah:**[\[14942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what data his Department holds on the potential impact of non-EU bicycle imports on (a) cycle distributors in the North East and (b) the bicycle manufacturing sector.

Sarah Jones:

The Department does not hold data on the potential impact of non-EU bicycle imports on cycle distributors in the North East or the bicycle manufacturing sector.

At the Budget, the Government announced we would be continuing funding for key business support programmes in 2025-26: Growth Hubs in England, and the Help to Grow: Management programme. We also announced we are extending Made Smarter Innovation with up to £37m funding. Funding for the Made Smarter Adoption programme will double to £16 million in 2025-26, supporting more small manufacturing businesses to adopt advanced digital technologies and enabling the programme to be expanded to all nine English regions.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Federation of Small Businesses**Andrew Griffith:**[\[13638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings he has had with representatives of the Federation of Small Businesses since 30 October 2024 on the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on small businesses.

Gareth Thomas:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) engaged with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) as part of a budget briefing call with retail, hospitality and small business representatives held on 4 November. Topics raised included measures to improve small businesses exports, and the close engagement between departments on Industrial Strategy and the recent late payments announcement.

FSB also attended a roundtable discussion with the Secretary of State and SMEs on Industrial Strategy on 6 November. DBT Ministers and officials continue to engage regularly with FSB on a range of issues.

■ Food: Norfolk

Ben Goldsborough:

[\[15554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help support food producers from Norfolk to increase exports.

Gareth Thomas:

DBT provides a wide-ranging package of export support for food and drink businesses in Norfolk and across the whole of the UK. This includes educational support to upskill food producers via our Export Academy and one to one support from International Trade Advisors and our extensive overseas network, with trade advisors promoting UK food in over 100 countries. Overseas we deliver a comprehensive programme of trade shows, trade missions and events to connect exporters with buyer and new market opportunities. Our UK Export Finance agency helps companies access export finance, with a dedicated finance manager covering Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: South Norfolk

Ben Goldsborough:

[\[15555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an estimate of the number of jobs created via foreign direct investment in South Norfolk constituency in the last 12 months.

Sarah Jones:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) works closely with local authorities and investment partners to monitor and support the impact of foreign direct investment in the South Norfolk constituency.

Foreign direct investment in the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area resulted in 14 FDI projects and the creation of 516 new jobs in 2023-24, including both single-site and multi-site projects. While this area covers South Norfolk, specific statistics for the parliamentary constituency are not published due to confidentiality concerns.

■ Post Offices

Lee Anderson:

[\[15500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with the Post Office on maintaining local post office services.

Gareth Thomas:

The Secretary of State and I have met with the CEO and Chair of Post Office Limited to ensure that Post Office delivers for postmasters and its communities. We recently met with the Post Office Chair, Nigel Railton, and discussed his proposals for the future of the company before Mr Railton announced Post Office's Transformation Plan on 13th November. While Post Office has the freedom to make commercial

decisions regarding the composition of its network, Government sets the parameters for the Post Office to operate in.

Government protects the branch network by setting minimum access criteria which require 99% of the UK population to be within three miles of their nearest Post Office outlet. The access criteria ensure that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

■ Post Offices: Closures

James McMurdock: [\[15372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of post office closures on high streets.

Gareth Thomas:

Government fully appreciates the impact a Post Office branch closure can have on a community, particularly for communities who don't have nearby alternatives.

Although Post Office has the freedom to make commercial decisions regarding the composition of its network, Government protects the Post Office network and high street post offices by setting minimum access criteria. These include the requirements which ensure for example that in urban areas, 95% of the total population across the UK live within 1 mile of their nearest post office and in urban deprived areas 99% live within 1 mile of their nearest post office. The Government-set access criteria ensures that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

James McMurdock: [\[15373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of post office closures on (a) high-streets and (b) consumers in Essex.

Gareth Thomas:

Government fully appreciates the impact a Post Office branch closure can have on a community. It knows it can be disruptive, particularly for communities who don't have nearby alternatives.

Although Post Office has the freedom to make commercial decisions regarding the composition of its network, Government protects the Post Office network and high street post offices by setting minimum access criteria. These include the requirements which ensure for example that in urban areas, 95% of the total population across the UK live within 1 mile of their nearest post office and in urban deprived areas 99% live within 1 mile of their nearest post office. The Government-set access criteria ensures that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

■ Small Businesses: Finance

Paula Barker:

[14964]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department plans to provide additional funding to small businesses to help meet additional costs arising from the Autumn Budget 2024.

Gareth Thomas:

The Government remains committed to helping small businesses thrive and will be publishing our Small Business Strategy next year. This will set out our vision for all small businesses, from boosting scale-ups to growing the co-operative economy.

At the Autumn Budget, the Chancellor announced £250 million for the British Business Bank's small business finance programmes in 2025/26. Additional funding for two key growth-driving programmes was also announced for 2025/26: Growth Hubs in England and Help to Grow: Management across the UK. These programmes aim to help businesses and entrepreneurs unlock their potential through bespoke support and resources.

■ Trade Agreements

Adam Jogee:

[15029]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the implementation of existing free trade agreements.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

I refer my Hon. Friend to my response to Question 6963 on 5 November 2024:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-10-04/6963>

CABINET OFFICE

■ 10 Downing Street: Alcoholic Drinks

Rupert Lowe:

[13345]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much has been spent in Number 10 on alcohol since 3 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

Official receptions in 10 Downing Street are hosted by Ministers across Government, with details published each quarter as part of the Government's transparency returns. The cost of hospitality in 10 Downing Street is published in the Cabinet Office Annual Report and Accounts.

■ 10 Downing Street: Art Works

Mike Wood:

[15164]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office; for what reason painting GAC 0/34 was removed from 10 Downing Street.

Georgia Gould:

The painting referenced GAC 0/34 was removed from 11 Downing Street for restoration work.

■ **Business: Meetings****John Glen:**[\[13759\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance his Department issues on the conduct of meetings between Ministers and business representatives where such business representatives have paid money to the governing party to facilitate the meeting.

Georgia Gould:

There is longstanding guidance on meetings between ministers and external organisations which is set out in the Ministerial Code.

■ **Cabinet Office and Prime Minister: Travel****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[14976\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024 to Question 5291 on Cabinet Office and Prime Minister: Travel, if he publish his Department's intranet guidance.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office does not publish its intranet guidance for Travel policy in the public domain as it is intended for internal staff use only.

■ **Cabinet Office: Parliamentary Private Secretaries****Alex Burghart:**[\[13807\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many private secretaries each Minister in his Department has.

Georgia Gould:

There are 34 members of staff, at multiple grades, who support the seven Cabinet Office ministers.

■ **Cabinet Office: Staff****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[15236\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 18 September 2004 to Question 4680 on Civil Service, how many staff in the Cabinet Office have no post.

Georgia Gould:

At any point in time, there is likely to be a small number of individuals who have been displaced due to restructures within their business units or, for example, have returned from a loan from another department and their role no longer exists. The exact number changes on a day-to-day basis.

These individuals are attached to the Skills Match Hub but remain in their business units and are managed by their line managers to ensure they continue to receive meaningful work and are appropriately supported, while they work through the redeployment process.

As was the case under the previous administration, any new vacancies in Cabinet Office cannot be advertised until the role has been reviewed first by the Skills Match Hub for a possible match to anyone currently registered. If there are no suitable candidates registered, the vacancy can then be advertised.

■ **Civil Servants: Pay**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[14354\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the cost was of civil service pay (a) including and (b) excluding National Insurance employer contributions in the most recent 12 months for which data is available.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office does not hold actual outturn payroll costs for all Civil Service departments and organisations.

However, the estimated total snapshot paybill cost as at the 31st March 2024 is £28.1bn. This includes salary costs, in year and end of year non consolidated performance related payments (NCPSPs), and estimated employer national insurance and pensions payments using 2024/25 employer contribution rates.

Excluding estimated NI employer contributions the estimated paybill is £26.0bn.

Source: Annual Civil Service Employment Survey (ACES), Cabinet Office. Analysis of the pay data collected through ACES as at 31st March 2024.

■ **Civil Servants: Trade Union Officials**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[14975\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024 to Question 5290 on Civil Servants: Trade Union Officials, whether he plans to (a) collate and (b) publish data on trade union facility time after the repeal of the Trade Union Act 2016.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Rt. Hon. Member to the answer given to PQ 5290 on 11 September 2024.

■ **Civil Servants: Workplace Pensions**

Alex Burghart: [\[13804\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil servants (a) are members of the Alpha pension scheme, (b) are members of the Partnership pension scheme and (c) have opted out of both schemes.

Georgia Gould:

As at 31 October 2024, there were 588,623 active members of the alpha pension scheme. As well as civil servants, the Civil Service Pension arrangements cover employees of certain non-Civil Service organisations, such as non-Departmental Public Bodies, if they meet the Cabinet Office policy on eligibility for entry and legislative requirements on funding.

As at 30 June 2024 there were 8,748 active members of the partnership scheme.

As at 31 October 2024, a total of 3,894 people had opted out and were not members of either pension scheme.

■ Civil Service**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[14255\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans the Government has for civil service (a) headcount levels and (b) budgets for the next five years.

Georgia Gould:

This government is committed to ensuring departments consider overall value for money in resourcing decisions.

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

As set out in the Budget, the government has committed to developing a long-term strategic plan for a more efficient and effective Civil Service, including bold options to improve skills, harness digital technology and drive better outcomes for public services.

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

■ Civil Service: Equality**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[14353\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an estimate of the potential cost to the Civil Service of proposed changes to (a) statutory rights for trade union equality representatives and (b) facility time and associated office facilities via the Employment Rights Bill.

Georgia Gould:

The Employment Rights Bill is a significant step towards ensuring workplace rights are fit for a modern economy and aims to strengthen the work of unions and union representatives in the workplace and support growth.

The Government published impact assessments alongside the Bill which covered the expected benefits and costs to employers of the new measures and has committed to carrying out a post implementation review in five years of the repeal of the 2016 Trade Union Act.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[14973\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Answer of 7 October 2024 to Question HL1058 on Civil Service: Equality, whether Departments are required to report exemptions to his Department.

Georgia Gould:

Yes. Departments are required to report exemptions under the Civil Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Expenditure Guidance to the Cabinet Office.

■ **Commercial Organisation Remuneration Committee**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[14704\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his letter to the Chair of the Senior Salaries Review Body, published on 30 September 2024, who the members of the Government Commercial Organisation Remuneration Committee are.

Georgia Gould:

Members of the Remuneration Committee are: two Non-Executive members (including the Chair), the Government Chief Commercial Officer, and two independent members comprising a senior Cabinet Office HR representative and a HM Treasury representative.

■ **Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals**

Mike Wood:

[\[14966\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what weight is given to the Prime Minister's views through his Principal Private Secretary on the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals.

Georgia Gould:

The Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary is a member of the committee, and their views carry equal weight to all other committee members.

■ **Contracts for Services: Trade Unions**

Mike Wood:

[\[14312\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 7 October 2024 to Question 5121 on Employment, what requirements will private firms bidding for public sector contracts have to ensure (a) trade union access, (b) collective bargaining arrangements and (c) trade union recognition in order to win such contracts.

Georgia Gould:

The Government will bring forward a new National Procurement Policy Statement under the Procurement Act that will deliver a mission-led procurement regime. It will drive value for money, economic growth and social value.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices**Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[12890\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 October 2024 to Question 9615 on Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Ministers' Private Offices, how much the Government Property Agency spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items.

Georgia Gould:

The Government Property Agency has confirmed £42,095.42 excluding VAT was spent on new furniture and fittings plus other refurbishment (including moves) in relation to private offices for the Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero ministers. This is broken down as follows;

- New Furniture and Fittings - £28,707.49
- Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves - £13,387.93

It should be noted that the number of Ministers in DESNZ increased by one following the general election, the result of which was a higher than usual spend to facilitate an additional office.

■ Government Departments: Directors**John Glen:**[\[10986\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the answer of 17 September 2024 to Question 4655 on Public Sector: Directors, which Non-Executive Board Members have left which Departments since 4 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

The list of Non-Executive Board Members who have left government departments since 4 July 2024 was provided in my previous answer of 13th November, PQ 9162.

■ Government Departments: Disclosure of Information**Rupert Lowe:**[\[13341\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many non-disclosure agreements were signed by each Government Department in financial year 2023-24.

Georgia Gould:

Departments are required to report to the Cabinet Office on an annual basis the number of confidentiality clauses used in connection with special severance payments, however full information on the use of non-disclosure agreements is held by individual departments.

■ Government Departments: ICT

Rupert Lowe:

[\[13561\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what hardware was lost by each Department in each of the last ten years; and what the value was of that hardware.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office does not hold data on losses of hardware by other government departments.

The Cabinet Office only holds data on the loss of laptops, mobile phones and MiFi/tablets by Cabinet Office staff, including staff working for the Crown Commercial Service, the Government Property Agency, and the Office for the Secretary of State for Scotland (to whom the Cabinet Office supplies the IT platform and IT equipment only)

since 2018. This data is provided below.

The data does not include Number 10, which has separate supply arrangements in place.

Information on the value of the hardware lost could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Cabinet Office staff are responsible for keeping all portable devices assigned to them safe and secure and must immediately report any loss or damage of their IT equipment. When losses are reported, devices are disabled to ensure they are unable to access any Cabinet Office data.

YEAR	LAPTOP	MOBILE PHONE	MIFI/TABLET
2018	54	80	8
2019	86	176	27
2020	57	114	11
2021	49	118	7
2022	63	147	7
2023	54	157	12
2024	66	154	109

■ Government Departments: Incentives**Rupert Lowe:** [\[14732\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an estimate of the (a) total number and (b) cost to the public purse per Department of Government bonuses in each of the last 10 years.

Georgia Gould:

Departments have published aggregated annual information on their bonus spend on their own websites since 2011. This data includes information on total bonus spend, the number of civil servants receiving bonuses, and the size of payments.

■ Honours: Public Appointments**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[14712\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, which competitions for appointments to Independent Honours Committees have been (a) terminated without appointment and (b) re-opened since 5 July 2024; and what the cost of those competitions was.

Georgia Gould:

Since 5 July 2024, competitions for appointments to the (i) Community and Voluntary Service (ii), Parliamentary and Political Service, and (iii) Diversity and Outreach (formerly called Representation and Outreach) Honours Committees were closed and reopened to allow for the widest range of applications. We do not hold information about the costs of specific competitions.

■ NHS: Staff**Pam Cox:** [\[15261\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the prohibition of two-tier workforce regulations will be applied to all NHS- funded outsourced contracts since 4 July 2024; and whether he has asked NHS England to provide guidance to NHS organisations..

Georgia Gould:

The Employment Rights Bill, once in force, will provide powers to make regulations to introduce provisions for new protections for transferring workers in relevant outsourcing contracts. The provisions will apply to contracting authorities as defined in the Procurement Act 2023, which includes NHS bodies, subject to exceptions that will be set out in regulations. The regulations will be developed in due course and will not apply retrospectively. The Procurement Act 2023 does not apply to the procurement of health care services, which are regulated by DHSC's Provider Selection Regime.

■ Office for National Statistics: Civil Servants

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[9834\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil servants are assigned to work in each office of the Office for National Statistics; and how many desks are available in each office.

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[9835\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many and what proportion of desks were occupied in each Office for National Statistics office 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:

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

A response to the Hon Gentleman's Question of 17 October is attached.

Attachments:

1. [Letter from the National Statistician](#) [PQ9834_9835 V4 (1) (1).pdf]

■ Prime Minister: Communication

John Glen: [\[7442\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answers of 27 September 2024 to Questions 4998 and 4988 on Prime Minister: Communication, on which page of the Cabinet Office annual report and accounts 2022-23 is the information on (a) spending and (b) staff working on digital communications in Downing Street listed.

Georgia Gould:

Information about overall departmental resourcing is set out in relevant annual reports (or published elsewhere in the relevant document). Annual reports do not include a breakdown by individual teams. This remains unchanged in size since the election.

■ Prime Minister's Office: Vacancies

John Glen: [\[6057\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many and what proportion of job vacancies at 10 Downing Street were externally advertised in the period since 4 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

For management and staffing purposes the Prime Minister's Office is a business unit of the Cabinet Office and consistently follows the same principles, protocols and approvals to recruitment as all other areas of the Department.

Since the General Election there have been 20 job vacancies at 10 Downing Street. Of these 8 were advertised externally. The 12 vacancies that were not advertised externally were either for short term cover (3-6 months and one was a slightly longer

maternity cover) or for roles that required extensive and specific Civil Service knowledge and experience. This approach is in keeping with practice in previous administrations.

■ **Procurement: National Security**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[14974\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 8 November 2024 to Question 10699 on Procurement: National Security, what the topic was of the evaluation that met an exemption under the Act.

Georgia Gould:

The topic of the evaluation which is currently exempt from publication is Defra's Northern Ireland Programme.

■ **Public Appointments**

Alex Burghart: [\[14111\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will list all formal notifications his Department has submitted to the Commissioner for Public Appointments since 4 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

Since 4 July 2024 the Cabinet Office has engaged with the Commissioner for Public Appointments to seek approval of Senior Independent Panel Members for two recruitment campaigns: the Chair of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Chair of the Advisory Committee on Public Appointments (ACOPA).

■ **Senior Civil Servants: Pay**

Alex Burghart: [\[13800\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to increase the pay bands of Permanent Secretaries.

Georgia Gould:

The Government is committed to delivering value for money for the taxpayer. We will publish written evidence to the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) later this year, and will consider any recommendations from the SSRB on the remuneration of Senior Civil Servants, including Permanent Secretaries, when it reports next year.

■ **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[12703\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make an assessment of the (a) effectiveness of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and (b) potential merits of adopting that legislation nationwide.

Georgia Gould:

The UK Government works closely and discusses a range of matters with colleagues in the Welsh Government. Consideration of the effectiveness of devolved legislation is a matter for the relevant devolved legislature and government. The Cabinet Office therefore has not carried out a specific assessment of the effectiveness of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**Cricket and Football: Sportsgrounds****Shivani Raja:**[\[15032\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what information her Department holds on the number of (a) football and (b) cricket pitches there are in England.

Stephanie Peacock:

According to Sport England's Active Places database, there are 53,665 grass football pitches in England. This encompasses adult football, junior football 11 a-side, junior football 9 a-side, mini soccer 7 a-side and mini soccer 5 a-side pitches. Furthermore there are also 3,013 artificial full-size grass pitches and 4,419 small-sided artificial grass pitches in England.

There are 9,057 grass cricket pitches in England.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Local Government Association**Max Wilkinson:**[\[15119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has met with the Local Government Association since her appointment.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has met with the Deputy Chair of the Local Government Association and a range of Local Government leaders since her appointment.

Leisure Centres: Energy**Stuart Anderson:**[\[14979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to help leisure centres conduct renovations to reduce their energy consumption.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government recognises that leisure centres are important to communities up and down the country. High-quality, inclusive facilities help people get active.

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

Leisure: Finance**Rachel Taylor:** [\[15355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to ensure councils have appropriate funding for (a) grassroots sports and (b) leisure facilities; and if she will take steps to support the renovation of Atherstone Leisure Centre.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government recognises that grassroots sports facilities are at the beating heart of communities up and down the country and is acting to support more people to get active wherever they live. We are doing this via the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme, which will invest £123 million UK-wide throughout 2024/25.

The Government encourages local leaders to prioritise access to sport and physical activity wherever possible. Local Authorities are responsible for decisions regarding sport and leisure provision in their area.

Press Freedom**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[14926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to help support press freedom.

Stephanie Peacock:

Having a free and fair press in an age of misinformation and disinformation, is more important than ever. It is vital that the public have access to accurate and trustworthy information from a range of different sources.

To ensure journalists operating within the UK can do so free from physical, legal and online threats, abuse and violence, I am reconvening the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, together with the Minister for Safeguarding and Violence against Women and Girls, in December. The Committee facilitates collaboration between government, journalism, policing, prosecution services and civil society in support of this aim. I will continue to work with members on this important issue, including by delivering the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists.

DEFENCE**Ajax Vehicles****Ben Obese-Jecty:** [\[15669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to equip infantry battalions with the Ares armoured personnel carrier.

Maria Eagle:

The Army is currently undergoing a combined programme of work to ensure our Land Forces will have the lethality, protection and mobility to fight and win against any

adversary. Whilst the Army's modernisation will continue over the next decade with a programme of investment worth billions of pounds, future capability development priorities will be guided by the Strategic Defence Review.

The ARES platform is a variant of the Armoured Cavalry Programme (Ajax) and remains on track to deliver Initial Operating Capability by December 2025.

With regards to the current steps being taken to equip infantry battalions, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 21 November 2024 to Question 14825, which explains that planned future operational establishment will see Infantry Battalions equipped and structured around the Boxer platform.

■ Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

Anna Dixon:

[\[15323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 10637 on the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, whether he plans to (a) extend the scheme and (b) offer an alternative scheme to veterans who served before May 1987.

AI Carns:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 30 October 2024, to Question 10637.

Attachments:

1. [Armed Forces Compensation Scheme](#) [10637 - Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.docx]

■ Armed Forces: Cadets

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[14921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support the cadet forces in (a) the London Borough of Havering, (b) Romford constituency and (c) England.

AI Carns:

The Government is convinced of the benefits of cadets, not just for young people who participate, but for society as a whole. Participation in the Cadet Forces has significant positive impacts on young people, increasing their performance at school and improving their employment and career prospects.

The Cadet Forces instil values and standards and provide the opportunity for young people to develop key skills including self-discipline, confidence, and resilience which equip them for life.

The skills, confidence, and cultural capital that young people gain from being cadets improves their social mobility, and in terms of health and wellbeing alone, participation in the Cadet Forces produces an annual return on investment in the region of £95 million.

For all of these reasons, we are committed to sustaining the Cadet Forces across the UK.

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[15010\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 13 November 2024 to Question 11294 on Armed Forces: Cadets, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the ending of the additional SSI grant on the long term sustainability of school cadet forces.

Al Carns:

The development and sustainability of school cadet units depends on a range of factors including senior leadership team support and the ability to attract and retain adult volunteers to manage and deliver cadet activities.

Our commitment to supporting the school-based Combined Cadet Force and the Cadet Expansion Programme in schools remains unchanged. We are very aware of the benefits that cadet activity brings to the young people themselves and of the positive contribution that having a cadet unit makes to schools.

Therefore, we continue to invest £3.6 million per year in the programme so that more young people can enjoy the benefits of the cadet experience, but I have also directed that a review be undertaken to ascertain how we can deliver more cadet activity both in schools and in the wider community settings. The role and support to the SSI will figure in this review.

■ Armed Forces: Training

John Cooper:

[\[15293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had discussions with his counterparts in Scotland on (a) the potential impact of armed forces' training activities on (i) nature conservation and (ii) public access to the countryside in Dumfries and Galloway and (b) the proposed national park in Galloway.

Maria Eagle:

Ministry of Defence (MOD) officials have engaged with Scottish counterparts on the impact of Armed Forces training on nature conservation and public access to the countryside in Dumfries and Galloway.

MOD officials have developed Integrated Rural Management Plans (IRMP) for MOD sites in Dumfries and Galloway. These plans include a level of ecological impact assessment and public access management. The IRMPs identify appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures that must be applied to manage the impact of military training and operations on these sites.

MOD officials have not held any discussions with counterparts in Scotland on the proposed national park in Galloway.

■ Defence: Research**Martin Wrigley:**[\[15111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department allocated to spending on defence research and development in the last 12 months.

Maria Eagle:

The Department's spend on research and development for financial year (FY) 2023-24 was £2.6 billion. Spend for the period in FY 2024-25 will be published in the Departmental Annual Report and Accounts after the end of this financial year.

■ HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark: Decommissioning**James Cartlidge:**[\[15459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of his decision to retire HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion on the operational capability of the Royal Marines.

Maria Eagle:

The retirement of HMS Albion and Bulwark will not impact the operational programme of the Royal Marines, who continue to deploy globally.

Both are currently held at lower readiness having not been to sea since 2023 and 2017 respectively. On current planning, neither was due to go to sea again before their planned out of service dates of 2033 and 2034.

The Royal Marines are supported by the three Bay Class Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary)s and RFA ARGUS, which also provides aviation support and acts as a hospital ship. These ships will continue to support amphibious capability until they are succeeded by planned Multi Role Support Ships.

■ HMS Devonshire**James Cartlidge:**[\[15455\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate he has made of the cost of repairing the structural damage to HMS Devonshire.

Maria Eagle:

There is no ship of the name HMS Devonshire currently in service with the Royal Navy.

■ Nuclear Weapons**Manuela Perteghella:**[\[15093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to ensure the independence of the nuclear deterrent; and if he will take steps to reduce reliance on the US for the (a) testing, (b) maintenance, and (c) replacement of missiles.

Luke Pollard:

The United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent is completely operationally independent. Only the Prime Minister can authorise the use of our nuclear weapons, even if they are to be employed as part of a NATO response.

We have a close and longstanding relationship with the US on all nuclear issues. One result of this close relationship is that we are able to procure certain non-nuclear components from the US, most notably the Trident II D5 missile, significantly reducing the cost of our nuclear deterrent capability.

■ Veterans: Age**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[15241\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many and what proportion of veterans are over retirement age.

Al Carns:

Census data for England and Wales in 2021 and Scotland in 2022 showed that there were approximately 1,071,000 veterans of UK Armed Forces living in Great Britain who were aged 65 years and over, the most relevant age bracket available from the Census data, representing approximately 53% of all veterans. This number and proportion are expected to decrease over time.

■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure**Liz Saville Roberts:**[\[15649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a specified financial compensation scheme for (a) nuclear test veterans present during the nuclear testing programme from 1952 to 1967 and (b) their families.

Luke Pollard:

The Ministry of Defence has no current plans to develop a specific compensation scheme for either Nuclear Test Veterans or their families. Those who participated in the nuclear test programme and feel they were negatively impacted are able to apply to the War Pensions Scheme.

The War Pensions Scheme is a no-fault scheme which provides compensation for Service personnel who are disabled or die due to injury caused or made worse by service in the UK Armed Forces before 6 April 2005. There are also a range of supplementary pensions and allowances payable, including for dependants.

This Government is fully committed to engaging with Nuclear Test Veterans and their families to discuss their concerns. The Minister for Veterans and People has already commissioned a range of work within the Department to examine some of the concerns raised by the Nuclear Test Veteran community, including that of medical records.

EDUCATION**■ Breakfast Clubs: Special Educational Needs****Tom Hayes:**[\[15339\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that breakfast clubs in primary schools are accessible for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Tom Hayes:[\[15340\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that breakfast clubs in primary schools are accessible for children with special educational needs and disabilities who receive school transport.

Tom Hayes:[\[15341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that primary level special schools receive funding for breakfast clubs.

Stephen Morgan:

Breakfast clubs will mean that many more pupils get a supportive start to the day and are ready to learn. They will also benefit parents and mean that many pupils who would not otherwise have had breakfast will be well fed to start the day.

As confirmed at the Autumn Budget 2024, this government will triple the investment in breakfast clubs to over £30 million in the 2025/26 financial year, enabling 750 early adopter schools to open breakfast clubs from April 2025. All state-funded schools, including special and alternative provision schools, will be eligible to apply. Details on the application process for schools will follow shortly.

The department recognises that there will be barriers, such as staffing and transport, to opening breakfast clubs for some schools, including special and alternative provision schools. The early adopter programme will allow us to test and learn how best to overcome such barriers and refine the department's support and advice to schools to ensure the programme works for these schools.

■ Children in Care**Ellie Chowns:**[\[15130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to collect data on the number of children in care that are living in placements that are not in line with their care plan.

Janet Daby:

Information on whether a looked after child is currently living in a placement that is not in line with their care plan is not held by the department. Information on the numbers of children looked after who were moved to a new placement during the reporting year ending 31 March 2024 and the reasons why the placement changed, including a change to or implementation of a care plan, is submitted by local

authorities. This information was recently published on 14 November 2024 in the department's statistical release and can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/f2f7a002-bc22-40de-ada3-08dcedcfecfd>.

The department is working to improve the data available about children's social care, including making it more relevant to the experiences of children, young people and families. A core part of this work includes understanding the data needs of the children's social care sector as a whole and identifying ways in which data gaps may be addressed over time. Addressing data gaps in children's social care is a long term endeavour due to the need to agree data definitions and standards, as well as redesign local authority and departmental systems before rolling out nationally.

Laura Trott: [15283]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to increase the number of places for looked after children.

Laura Trott: [15284]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her statement of 18 November 2024 on Children's Social Care, Official Report columns 23 to 25, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the changes announced on the number of places available for looked after children.

Laura Trott: [15285]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her statement of 18 November 2024 on Children's Social Care, Official Report column 25, at what level she plans to cap profit from children's social care placements.

Laura Trott: [15286]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she will be taking steps to (a) improve the quality of children's homes and (b) increase the regularity of inspection of those homes.

Janet Daby:

As at 31 March 2024, there were 83,630 looked after children, which was similar to the previous year. The government has announced the following measures to ensure there are more of the right placements to meet the needs of looked after children:

- £44 million investment to support children in kinship care and foster care. This includes trialling a new kinship allowance in up to ten local authorities and ensuring that every local authority has access to a regional recruitment hub.
- £90 million to maintain capacity and expand provision in secure and open residential children's homes. This will include creating 200 additional open children's homes beds. This will provide safe and suitable homes for some of our vulnerable children and young people.

Building on this investment in kinship, fostering and children's homes, this government will go further to reform the children's social care system by helping

children to stay with their families where possible, fixing the broken care market, and investing in key enablers which underpin the system.

As the suite of reforms are developed, we will assess the impact for children, the social care system (including care places and workforce pressures) and the value for money of our reforms. Impact assessments will be published at the point of introducing proposals, subject to parliamentary procedure and time.

The level of any future cap on the profits of children's social care placement providers would depend on a number of factors, including market conditions at the point it was introduced. Before introducing any such cap we would consult fully, including with providers and local authorities.

On the quality of children's homes and inspection, the department is working hard to improve the quality of this provision through numerous avenues. We will seek to strengthen Ofsted's powers to hold provider group owners of children's homes and other children's social care provision to account where there are quality issues across several settings owned by a group. This will help to resolve issues quickly and ensure the quality of children's placements.

The department is also working closely with Ofsted as they revise both their Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF) and Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework in response to the Big Listen. We welcome their focus on ensuring that inspections are a constructive force in the sector that champion good practice, empower leaders and also that the progress and experiences of children are at the heart of inspection.

Additionally, the department is working with Social Work England to scope and develop options for establishing professional registration for children's homes managers and staff. This has the potential to raise the status and profile of working in the sector and improve the quality of provision by providing greater oversight of those working in the sector. We are confident that the ongoing work on provider oversight, updates to the SCCIF and development the workforce will result in significant improvements to the quality of children's homes and inspection processes.

There are no plans to increase the frequency of inspections this year. Children's homes normally receive a full inspection at least once annually and if leaders and managers have shown that they can consistently deliver services for children well, it may be appropriate to return less often or do a more proportionate inspection. However, Ofsted always takes into account the risk to children of not inspecting as frequently.

■ Church Schools: Academies

Nick Timothy:

[15049]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has received representations from (a) the Catholic Education Service and (b) dioceses on the decision to end trust (i) capacity funding and (ii) establishment and growth and academy conversion payments.

Catherine McKinnell:

Ministers and departmental officials have regular discussions with the Catholic Education Service (CES) and with dioceses. Departmental officials met the CES this month and they discussed the announcement to end the voluntary converter grant from 1 January 2025 and the Trust Capacity Fund, and the implications for Catholic schools.

■ Educational Psychology: Labour Turnover and Recruitment**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[15008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the challenges of (a) recruiting and (b) retaining educational psychologists to ensure the effective processing of education, health and care plans.

Dr Luke Evans:[\[15009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to increase the number of educational psychologists.

Catherine McKinnell:

This department'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.

Educational psychologists play a critical role in supporting children and young people, providing statutory input into education, health and care assessments and advising the school workforce on how to support children and young people with SEND.

As the employers of educational psychology services, it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that their services are adequately staffed. The department is taking measures to support local authorities by investing in building the pipeline.

The department is investing over £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists from this year. This builds on the £10 million currently being invested in the training of over 200 educational psychologists who began their training in September 2023.

To support retention, following graduation, trainees who have had their training funded by the department are required to remain in local authority employment for a minimum period. For trainees beginning their course in September 2024, this requirement has increased to three years.

■ Foster Care**Melanie Onn:**[\[15018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's statistical release entitled Children looked after in England including adoptions, last updated 14 November 2024, how many children were looked after in a (a) relative and (b) friend foster placements per local authority area on 31 March 2024.

Melanie Onn:

[\[15019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's statistical release entitled Children looked after in England including adoptions, last updated 14 November 2024, how many children were looked after in (a) relative and (b) friend foster placements broken down by (i) age, (ii) gender and (iii) ethnicity on 31 March 2024.

Melanie Onn:

[\[15020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's statistical release entitled Children looked after in England including adoptions, last updated 14 November 2024, how many children that were looked after in (a) relative and (b) friend foster placements on 31 March 2024 had also been in (i) an unrelated foster placement, (ii) another relative or friend placement, (iii) a children's home and (iv) other provisions for looked-after children.

Janet Daby:

The latest figures on children looked after who were cared for in a relative or friend foster placement by age, gender and ethnicity and at local authority level are shown in the attached tables. The department does not hold the data broken down separately into a) relative and b) friend foster placements, so we cannot provide this more detailed breakdown. Data has been provided for children looked after as at 31 March 2024.

Full information on the former placement arrangements of children looked after who are in a relative or friend foster placement is not held in the form requested. Due to the way in which the data is held, analysts in the department would not be able to provide the information requested without exceeding the cost threshold applicable to central government.

Attachments:

1. [Children looked after by Local Authority](#) [15018 15019 15020_attachment_children_looked_after_foster_placement_family_or_friend_by_local_authority.xlsx]
2. [Children looked after by gender](#) [15018 15019 15020_attachment_children_looked_after_foster_placement_family_or_friend_by_age_ethnicity_gender.xlsx]

■ Free School Meals: Departmental Coordination

Kim Johnson:

[\[14992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on automatically enrolling all eligible pupils for free school meals.

Stephen Morgan:

The department recognises the vital role played by free school meals (FSM) and encourages all eligible families to take their entitlement up. There are currently around 2.1 million pupils eligible for and claiming FSM.

To make it as easy as possible to receive FSM, the department provides the Eligibility Checking System, which allows local authorities to quickly verify eligibility for FSM.

The department is committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity so that all children have the freedom to achieve and thrive in education. Further to this, the department is working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to develop a child poverty strategy to reduce child poverty by tackling its root causes and giving every child the best start in life. The strategy will be published in the spring.

As with all government programmes, the department will keep its approach to FSM under continued review.

■ Health Education: Allergies

Gareth Snell:

[15017]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the Children's Wellbeing Bill will include provisions to help schools provide up to date allergy awareness education for pupils and staff.

Stephen Morgan:

The Children's Wellbeing Bill will ensure our education and children's social care systems transform life chances for millions of children and young people in England.

The precise content of the Bill will be confirmed upon the Bill's introduction, which will be as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units to make arrangements for supporting pupils with medical conditions, including allergies.

The accompanying statutory guidance 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions' makes clear to schools what is expected of them in taking reasonable steps to fulfil their legal obligations and to meet the individual needs of pupils with medical conditions. The guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>.

Schools should ensure they are aware of any pupils with medical conditions and have policies and processes in place to ensure these can be well managed. Policies should set out how staff will be supported in carrying out their role to support pupils, including how training needs are assessed and how training is commissioned and provided. Any member of school staff providing support to a pupil with medical needs should have received suitable training.

From September 2020, relationships education became compulsory for all primary school-aged pupils, relationships and sex education compulsory for all secondary school-aged pupils, and health education compulsory for all pupils in state-funded schools in England. The statutory guidance is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>.

This guidance states that by the end of primary school, pupils should be taught the facts and science relating to allergies, immunisation and vaccination.

The department is currently reviewing the relationships, sex and health education statutory guidance. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has been clear that children's wellbeing must be at the heart of this guidance for schools. As such the department will look carefully at the consultation responses, discuss with stakeholders and consider the relevant evidence before setting out next steps.

■ Nurseries: Employers' Contributions

Olly Glover: [\[15120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions, as announced in the Autumn Budget 2024, on the the cost of nursery provision for parents.

Stephen Morgan:

I refer the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage to the answer of 11 November 2024 to Question [12804](#).

■ Ofsted: Inspections

Laura Trott: [\[15662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an impact assessment of the decision for Ofsted to no longer produce single headline grades.

Laura Trott: [\[15688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an equalities impact assessment of the decision for Ofsted to no longer produce single headline grades.

Laura Trott: [\[15689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to publish an impact assessment of the decision for Ofsted to no longer produce single headline grades.

Laura Trott: [\[15690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to publish an equalities impact assessment of the decision for Ofsted to no longer produce single headline grades.

Catherine McKinnell:

On 2 September, the government announced that the use of single headline grades for Ofsted's school inspection would end with immediate effect, and that a new system of report cards would be launched from September 2025. Single headline grades were overly simplistic, being low information for parents and high stakes for schools.

Ofsted's Big Listen consultation, the largest in Ofsted's history, evidenced widespread concerns about single headline grades and the need for reform. Ofsted found that single headline grades were supported by only 3 in 10 professionals and 4 in 10 parents. The schools section of the consultation found that only 1 in 8 respondents agreed that the number of good and outstanding providers was reflective of the overall quality of the sector. Therefore, it was right for the government to act quickly and decisively to address this.

The department is currently engaging closely with Ofsted to develop proposals for new reporting arrangements, through a report card system, to capture the performance of schools in a much richer way, and to provide more helpful information to parents and support school improvement. The new reporting system will be accompanied by improved support arrangements through Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence teams. Proposals for the new arrangements will be subject to public consultation in the new year.

An equalities impact assessment will be carried out as part of the process of reform in the usual way.

■ Pre-school Education: Employers' Contributions

Mark Pritchard:

[\[14956\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the proposed increase in the rate of employers' National Insurance contributions on (a) nurseries and (b) pre-schools.

Stephen Morgan:

I refer the right hon. Member for The Wrekin to the answer of 11 November 2024 to Question [12804](#).

■ Primary Education: Food

Gareth Snell:

[\[15015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of primary schools have an exclusion policy for packed lunches and snacks.

Gareth Snell:

[\[15016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of secondary schools have an exclusion policy for packed lunches and snacks.

Stephen Morgan:

The department does not hold statistics on the proportion of primary schools or secondary schools that have an exclusion policy for packed lunches and snacks.

School governing boards are responsible for setting their school food policies, including food brought in from home.

The school food standards regulate the food and drink provided at both lunchtime and at other times of the school day. The standards restrict foods high in fat, salt and

sugar, which includes snacks and confectionary high in fat, sugar and salt. Compliance with the school food standards is mandatory for maintained schools, academies and free schools.

■ Private Education: VAT

Rupert Lowe:

[\[15395\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what consultations her Department is holding with public schools in relation to the removal of VAT exemptions.

Stephen Morgan:

The government carried out a technical consultation from 29 July to 15 September 2024 and published a response alongside a tax information and impact note on 30 October. The documents are published on GOV.UK and are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-on-private-school-fees-removing-the-charitable-rates-relief-for-private-schools>.

The government received over 17,000 written responses during the consultation period, all of which were carefully considered.

During the consultation period, the government also held a series of meetings with stakeholders who represent private schools. As the regulator of private schools, the department will continue to have regular meetings with representatives of private schools.

■ Special Educational Needs

Andrew Cooper:

[\[15081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the average age at which a child was referred for an Education, Health and Care Plan in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England in each of the last five years.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on education, health and care (EHC) plans is published in the statistical release 'Education, health and care plans'. This includes information on the total numbers of requests for an EHC plan received by each local authority. The publication can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-health-and-care-plans>.

The number of requests for an assessment for an EHC plan is shown in the attached table. The table gives the number of plans in each age group, plus the average age when a request was made. Information is supplied for England, and the local authorities Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester for the calendar years 2022 and 2023. Data on the number of requests by age is not available for years prior to 2022.

Information on the number of requests for an assessment for an EHC plan is not available at constituency level.

Attachments:

- 15081_EHC_plan_assessment_requests
[15081_attachment_EHC_plan_assessment_requests_2022_2023.xls]

Mr Lee Dillon:**[15082]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that education, health and care plan assessments are (a) progressed and (b) issued promptly.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer the hon. Member for Newbury to the answer of 26 November to Question [14834](#).

■ Special Educational Needs: Finance**Monica Harding:****[15583]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for which local authorities her Department has provided (a) support and (b) intervention for safety valve agreements since 2019.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department has made Safety Valve agreements with 38 local authorities. These are: Bath and North East Somerset, Barnsley, Bexley, Blackpool, Bolton, Bracknell Forest, Bristol, Bury, Cambridgeshire, Croydon, Darlington, Devon, Dorset, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Isle of Wight, Kent, Kingston upon Thames, Kirklees, Medway, Merton, Norfolk, North Somerset, North Tyneside, Richmond upon Thames, Rotherham, Salford, Slough, South Gloucestershire, Southwark, Stoke-on-Trent, Surrey, Torbay, Wiltshire, Wokingham and York. All agreements are published on GOV.UK and can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-very-high-deficit-intervention>.

Of these, five agreements are currently suspended. The local authorities with suspended agreements are Bath and North East Somerset, Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Hillingdon and Norfolk.

All Safety Valve local authorities receive ongoing support through the monitoring process.

■ Special Educational Needs: Staffordshire**Leigh Ingham:****[15146]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of access to SEND services in Staffordshire.

Catherine McKinnell:

Following the last Ofsted inspection, departmental officials have been working with Staffordshire County Council to closely monitor progress against the areas for improvement identified by inspectors. These areas were that coproduction was weak and that the quality of education, health and care plans was poor.

The department has appointed a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Advisor to support and work alongside Staffordshire County Council and the local area partnership.

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. The department is committed to taking a community wide approach in collaboration with local area partnerships, improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to children and young people with the most complex needs.

■ Teachers Pensions

Cat Eccles: [\[15142\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the causes of backlogs in Teachers' Pensions; and what steps she is taking to reduce such backlogs.

Paul Waugh: [\[15144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many people are currently waiting longer than the statutory 3-month period for a response from Teachers' Pensions on their cash equivalent transfer value details.

Paul Waugh: [\[15145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her expected timeframe is for resolving the backlog of people waiting for cash equivalent transfer value details from Teachers' Pensions.

Catherine McKinnell:

A backlog in the provision of cash equivalent transfer values (CETVs) to members of the Teachers' Pension Scheme has been caused by two issues. Initially, an embargo was placed on the provision of CETVs by the public service pension schemes from March 2023 to July 2023. This was a result of the need for new factors to be calculated following a change to the Superannuation Contributions Adjusted for Past Experience (SCAPE) discount rate. Not all of those cases could be cleared by the scheme administrator before the Transitional Protection (McCloud) legislation took effect on 1 October 2023. For those members affected by Transitional Protection, further cross-scheme guidance was needed by the scheme administrator which created another significant period in which CETV cases could not be processed.

As of 20 November 2024, there are 1,952 CETV cases which have not been processed three months after the member applied.

The majority of these cases do not include scheme flexibilities and the scheme administrator currently estimates that such cases will all be cleared by the end of February 2025. The department is working with the scheme administrator to determine the likely timeframe for cases that involve flexibilities and the small cohort where guidance is being finalised. Consideration is being given to measures to

reduce the timescales that members are waiting, including investigating the potential for any further automation of calculations, simplification of the CETV figures provided to the member and maximising the administrative resource available, for example through ongoing overtime.

■ Truancy

Mike Amesbury:

[15012]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential (a) implications for her policies of trends in the level of unauthorised term time absences and (b) impact of unauthorised absence rules on families who are unable to find suitable times for holidays outside of (i) school term times and (ii) work schedules.

Stephen Morgan:

The new government has inherited a crisis in school attendance. Thanks to the hard work of schools, local authorities and system leaders there is evidence of slight progress but we must go much further to get children back to school. This government is acting decisively to tackle absence via a new approach rooted in responsibility, partnership and belonging. This includes supporting schools and recognising they have important responsibilities by creating a welcoming, engaging and inclusive environment for children, but that it is also a parent's legal responsibility to send their children to school every day that they can.

Taking children out of school during term time can damage their education. If children are taken out of school for a one week holiday every year and have an average number of days off for sickness and medical appointments, then by the time they finish year 11 at age 16, they will have missed the equivalent of two entire terms of their schooling. This also causes unnecessary disruption for teachers, making it more difficult for them to plan lessons and cover the curriculum, which is then disruptive for the other pupils in the class. The school year gives families various opportunities to enjoy holidays together.

The department is working with the sector to bring breakfast clubs to all primary schools so that every child is in on time and ready to learn. We are introducing new annual Ofsted reviews of safeguarding, attendance and off-rolling, as well as tackling mental ill-health among young people by providing access to specialist mental health professionals in every school. Where pupils are not regularly attending school, the 'Working together to improve school attendance' statutory guidance emphasises that schools and local authorities should be working with them and their family to provide support and remove any barriers to attendance.

We publish regular school attendance data, which shows rates of absence, including unauthorised absence, on an ongoing basis. This is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools>.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Biofuels: Subsidies

Claire Young:

[\[15060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of reallocating subsidies for burning bioenergy towards lower carbon renewables.

Michael Shanks:

The Government has set an ambitious target of clean power by 2030 as part of its mission to become a clean energy superpower. We have received advice from the NESO on how to achieve this target. We will review this advice and outline our approach to clean power by 2030 in our Action Plan, expected later this year. The role of different low carbon technologies in the future electricity system, including biomass, will be considered as part of that.

■ Community Energy: Finance

Tom Hayes:

[\[15102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent progress he has made on considering proposals from local authorities for funding from the Local Power Plan.

Michael Shanks:

The Local Power Plan, a core function of Great British Energy, will put communities at the heart of the energy transition. It will support Local and Combined Authorities and Community Energy Groups to roll out up to 8GW of renewable energy projects. Since July, UK government officials have been engaging with the Local Government Association and the Devolved Administrations on the Local Power Plan to ensure that local needs are carefully considered. The recent Budget outlined £125 million in 2025-26 to set up Great British Energy as an independent company and begin delivering on its core functions, including local projects.

■ Energy Supply: Nature Conservation

Claire Young:

[\[15059\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has plans to embed nature as a core priority in (a) the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan and (b) other energy planning frameworks.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is fully committed to protecting nature. That's why as part of the SSEP we are requiring NESO to give due consideration to environmental impacts and statutory environmental duties throughout all stages of its production. The SSEP will also be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and plan-level Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).

Wider energy planning frameworks such as the Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP) will take a whole energy system approach to strategic network planning and balance environmental impact as a key priority alongside economic cost, deliverability, and community impact.

■ Energy: Billing

Uma Kumaran: [\[15094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of support provided by energy companies to customers with their energy bills.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government welcomes the commitment by energy suppliers to support consumers this winter.

The Government and industry have worked together to deliver a £500m Winter Support Commitment, and we applaud suppliers stepping up on this matter.

We expect energy suppliers to do everything they can to support customers who are struggling with bills, especially vulnerable customers. It is important that anyone who is struggling to pay their energy bills contact their supplier.

■ Energy: Housing

Jim Shannon: [\[14933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he is taking steps to help domestic energy customers to (a) reinsulate their homes and (b) replace their boilers.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government's Warm Homes Plan will support investment in insulation, low carbon heating and other home improvements to cut bills. We will set out full details in due course.

Targeted schemes currently in place to deliver energy efficiency measures to low income and fuel poor households include the Energy Company Obligation and the Great British Insulation Scheme. The Boiler Upgrade scheme offers grant support to consumers wishing to replace their fossil fuel heating system.

We have also announced a new Warm Homes: Local Grant and Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund, with delivery expected in 2025. Support will be targeted at low-income homeowners, social housing and private tenants in England with energy performance upgrades and cleaner heating.

■ Fuel Poverty: Runcorn and Helsby

Mike Amesbury: [\[14993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the number of households in Runcorn and Helsby constituency in fuel poverty.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The latest statistics for the number of households in fuel poverty in 2022 in parliamentary constituencies in England, can be found in the published sub-regional fuel poverty statistics, in Table 4: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>. These statistics were published in line with the boundaries operating prior to the 2024 General Election. Subregional fuel poverty statistics using the 2024 parliamentary boundaries will be published on 5th December.

■ Great British Energy**Claire Young:****[15058]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on giving GB Energy a nature recovery duty.

Michael Shanks:

Great British Energy will be operationally independent and will deliver in line with a statement of strategic priorities. Its projects will be subject to all relevant environmental legislation, which the Secretary of State regularly engages cabinet colleagues on. This includes the Planning and Infrastructure Bill which aims to accelerate infrastructure delivery, while protecting nature, to achieve clean power by 2030.

Government wants improved outcomes for our environment. We are committed to protecting 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, halting biodiversity decline by 2030, and expanding nature-rich habitats such as wetlands, peat bogs, and forests.

■ Offshore Industry: Training**Tom Hayes:****[11784]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make it his policy to establish a retraining fund for workers currently employed in offshore oil and gas.

Michael Shanks:

The Government's priority is a fair, orderly and prosperous transition for the oil and gas sector in line with our climate and legal obligations. High-skilled long-term jobs for the sector are in clean energy. The Clean Energy Mission will unlock good jobs, protect consumers, and ensure energy security.

The Government recently set up the Office for Clean Energy Jobs to ensure we have the skilled workforce to meet the Clean Energy Mission and support workers through the transition. It is exploring interventions to reskill and upskill workers, and recently announced support for an industry-led Skills Passport for North Sea workers.

■ Renewable Energy

Pippa Heylings:

[\[15074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing local supply rights to allow smaller-scale renewable energy schemes to sell their power directly to local customers.

Michael Shanks:

The ability to access local energy supply is an important part of our energy system. Some suppliers already offer local tariffs, and other products and services are available that provide community benefits.

Ofgem has a consultation open at the moment on innovation in the retail market which aims to progress a conversation on the key barriers and enablers of retail innovation. Specifically, the consultation focuses on regulatory routes to market and presents options to help enable new innovative products and services that benefit consumers, including local and small-scale generation. Officials will continue to have conversations with Ofgem on this topic over the coming months.

■ Renewable Energy: International Cooperation

Dave Doogan:

[\[15655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will take steps with his international counterparts to negotiate a treaty on (a) ending fossil fuel (i) exploration and (ii) expansion, (b) phasing-out existing production of fossil fuels and (c) supporting a just transition to renewable energy.

Michael Shanks:

The UK will work closely with international partners to deliver our commitments to transition away from fossil fuels, as agreed at COP28, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, while ensuring our energy security. The Government has also just launched a Global Clean Power Alliance to accelerate the transition to clean energy.

The UK's international engagement is based on strong domestic leadership. One of the Government's missions is to deliver clean power by 2030, and the Government will consult later this year on implementing the manifesto position not to issue new oil and gas licences to explore new fields.

■ Sizewell C Power Station: Compensation

Carla Denyer:

[\[15095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2024 to Question 7946 on Sizewell C Power Station: Compensation, what (a) output in MWh his Department has assumed for Hinkley Point C and (b) discounting rate has been applied for sharing First-of-a-Kind costs with Hinkley Point C over the first 35 years of its lifetime; and whether the cost of the discounting rate is included in expenditure eligible for a Sizewell C Regulated Asset Base.

Michael Shanks:

EDF's assumed maximum capacity of HPC is 3.2GW, overlaid with assumptions for planned and unplanned outages. There isn't a specific discounting rate applied to the First-of-a-Kind cost sharing. Instead, the payment for this cost sharing is included in the forecast expenditure eligible for the SZC RAB, along with other eligible project costs; and the consumer costs, driven by the RAB, are discounted at the applicable Social Discount Rate used in the Government's Value for Money assessment of the SZC project.

■ Solar Power**Tom Hayes:**[\[15099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the contribution of on-shore solar energy to delivering the Government's target of clean power by 2030.

Michael Shanks:

The rapid expansion of onshore solar power will be critical to achieving the Government's clean power mission.

The Government will shortly publish its Clean Power Action Plan. Set for release by year-end, this will include estimates of the solar capacity needed to decarbonise the grid by 2030. Further detail about how Government and industry will meet these targets will be set out in the Solar Roadmap due for publication early next year.

Tom Hayes:[\[15101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the accuracy of the solar capacity identified in the report entitled Clean Power 2030, published by National Energy System Operator on 5 November 2024.

Michael Shanks:

Work is ongoing to examine the 'Clean Power 2030' report from the National Energy System Operator (NESO).

The Government will provide its own assessment of the generating capacity required to decarbonise the grid by 2030, in a Clean Power Action Plan, set for release by year-end. This will include capacity estimates for solar power and other technologies.

Wera Hobhouse:[\[15473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) restoring a three-year window for solar photovoltaics and (b) allowing solar Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects to bid in future Contracts for Difference auctions.

Michael Shanks:

Solar projects over 5MW were eligible to apply for Allocation Round 6. The Government is committed to accelerating solar deployment to meet clean power 2030 and reviews the Contracts for Difference scheme before every round to ensure it

continues to deliver this and other objectives. We will confirm details for Allocation Round 7, including eligibility, in due course.

■ **Solar Power: Bournemouth East**

Tom Hayes: [\[15100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to support the fitting of rooftop solar panels on (a) new build and (b) existing homes in Bournemouth East constituency; and how such solar panels will contribute to the Government's mission of clean energy by 2030.

Michael Shanks:

Future standards next year will set new homes and buildings on a path that moves away from relying on volatile fossil fuel markets and ensures they are fit for a net zero future. Our Warm Homes Plan will transform homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to run, from installing new insulation to rolling out low carbon heating like solar and heat pumps.

The Government is committed to working with industry to radically increase our existing solar capacity by 2030 to boost growth across the country, create thousands of high-skill, future-proofed jobs and tackle the climate crisis.

■ **Solar Power: Development Consent Orders**

Wera Hobhouse: [\[15474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to allow large-scale development consent order solar projects to bid for future Contracts for Difference auctions.

Michael Shanks:

Solar projects over 5MW were eligible to apply for Allocation Round 6. The Government is committed to accelerating solar deployment to meet clean power 2030 and reviews the Contracts for Difference scheme before every round to ensure it continues to deliver this and other objectives. We will confirm details for Allocation Round 7, including eligibility, in due course.

■ **Wind Power: Seas and Oceans**

Tom Hayes: [\[11785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport on funding for UK ports to improve capacity for the delivery of offshore wind.

Michael Shanks:

The Government recognises that ports play a vital role in the deployment, operation, and maintenance of offshore wind including floating offshore wind. The Department works closely with other government departments, including the Department for Transport, to understand the barriers to port investment and identify the most

appropriate future levers to overcome them. Further, the department is supporting the National Wealth Fund to invest at least £5.8 billion of the fund's capital in the five priority sectors announced in the Government's manifesto, including ports.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Air Pollution

Sarah Gibson:

[\[14899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of adopting World Health Organisation Air Standards.

Emma Hardy:

The Government is committed to meeting current legal targets for air quality, including the targets recently set under the Environment Act 2021, and will review the policy measures needed to achieve them. We will deliver a comprehensive Clean Air Strategy, including a series of interventions to reduce emissions so that everyone's exposure to air pollution is reduced.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) air quality guidelines are intended to inform the setting of air quality standards and are not ready-made targets for direct adoption as they do not consider achievability or individual countries' circumstances. However, we will consider WHO guidelines as part of an evidence led process when considering future targets.

Adam Jogee:

[\[15027\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of adopting the guidelines entitled WHO global air quality guidelines: particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide, published on 22 September 2021.

Emma Hardy:

The Government is committed to meeting current legal targets for air quality, including the targets recently set under the Environment Act 2021, and will review the policy measures needed to achieve them. We will deliver a comprehensive Clean Air Strategy, including a series of interventions to reduce emissions so that everyone's exposure to air pollution is reduced.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) air quality guidelines are intended to inform the setting of air quality standards and are not ready-made targets for direct adoption as they do not consider achievability or individual countries' circumstances. However, we will consider WHO guidelines as part of an evidence led process when considering future targets.

■ Flood Control: Land Drainage

Jim Shannon:

[\[14613\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the implementation of sustainable drainage systems to reduce flood risk.

Emma Hardy:

The Government is committed to improving the implementation of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to help mitigate flood risk and reduce the quantity of water that ends up in our drainage infrastructure. SuDS also provide filtration, amenity and biodiversity benefits.

The current implementation route for SuDS in new developments is via the National Planning Policy Framework, see paragraphs 173 and 175.

We believe that stronger SuDS outcomes can be achieved through either improving the current planning led approach using powers now available or commencing Schedule 3 to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. It is also important to ensure that appropriate adoption and maintenance arrangements are in place.

To help inform thinking, the Government asked a question on flooding in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation that concluded in September 2024. A response will be published by the end of the year.

■ Horses: Exports

Mr Lee Dillon:

[\[15080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to secure a Sanitary and Phytosanitary agreement with the EU to facilitate the movement of thoroughbred horses across borders.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Prime Minister and President of the European Commission met on 7 November at the European Political Community in Budapest, where they discussed the strength of the UK-EU partnership and the need to work together to tackle the challenges facing Europe. The Government will now work with the EU to identify areas where we can strengthen cooperation for mutual benefit.

The Government will seek to negotiate a veterinary/Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement to help boost trade and deliver benefits to businesses and consumers in the UK and the EU. The Government is ambitious and wants to move forward at pace, but delivering new agreements will take time. It is too early to provide an update on specific elements of any agreement at this point.

■ Marine Environment: Per- and Polyfluorinated Alkyl Substances

Jess Asato:

[\[15103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he is taking steps to prevent the proliferation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances in the marine environment.

Emma Hardy:

Action has already been taken to ban or highly restrict specific per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) both domestically and internationally, including PFOS (perfluoro-octane sulfonate), PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid) and PFHxS (perfluorohexanesulphonic acid), the use and production of which was prohibited in 2023.

Internationally, PFAS was added to the OSPAR List of Chemicals for Priority Action in 2023. This list identifies substances considered to be a threat to the marine environment and the actions that OSPAR Contracting Parties (including the UK) should take to minimise those threats. The UK Government is also working closely with domestic regulators and key stakeholders to improve wider understanding and approach to managing the risks from PFAS. This includes working with the Environment Agency (EA) to assess levels of PFAS occurring in the environment, their sources, and potential risks to inform future policy and regulatory approaches.

The EA monitors for PFAS in England. Additional PFAS are being added to those measured as the scientific capabilities and reference standards improve. The EA analyses PFAS in freshwater and saline fish. PFAS are also monitored in the marine environment by Centre for Environment, Fish and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), using samples from fish and cetaceans.

■ Marine Protected Areas: Norfolk

Sarah Champion:

[\[14963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October to Question 6253 on Marine Protected Areas: Fisheries, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of continued bottom trawl fishing in parts of the North Norfolk Sandbanks and Saturn Reef marine protected area on the (a) ecological integrity of the site and (b) achievement of its conservation objectives.

Emma Hardy:

The Marine Protected Areas Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Byelaw 2023, which came into force on 22 March 2024, prohibited the use of bottom-towed gear over the reef habitats of North Norfolk Sandbanks and Saturn Reef Marine Protected Area. The Marine Management Organisation has been making further assessments of the impact of fishing activities on other designated habitats throughout the site and, if needed, will consult on further fishing restrictions. As mentioned in my answers to PQ 4529 and PQ 11005, the Department is considering next steps for this and other sites.

■ Pesticides

Satvir Kaur: [\[14855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to reduce (a) agricultural and (b) horticultural pesticide use.

Emma Hardy:

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) lies at the heart of our approach to minimise the environmental impact of pesticides. IPM is a holistic approach that promotes a range of plant protection methods and keeps the use of pesticides to levels that are ecologically and economically justified.

The UK Pesticides National Action Plan will be published next year and will set out the government's strategy for sustainable use of pesticides.

■ Plastics: Consumption and Production

Sarah Dyke: [\[14246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2024 to Question 9584 on Plastics: Treaties, what level of (a) production and (b) consumption of primary plastic polymers is sustainable.

Emma Hardy:

The UK supports measures under the proposed Global Plastics Treaty to reduce the production and consumption of primary plastic polymers to sustainable levels, and the Government recognises that further work will be needed to establish what those sustainable levels are.

The UK will continue to advocate for the importance of following the science, as well as supporting measures to ensure greater transparency across the plastics lifecycle, to allow the future Conferences of the Parties to make evidence-based decisions.

■ Plastics: Recycling

Andrew Cooper: [\[15077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to incentivise councils to increase the range of plastic packaging that can be recycled at the kerbside through the Extended Producer Responsibility.

Mary Creagh:

Simpler Recycling is a reform to the recycling system which means that people across England will be able to recycle the same materials, whether at home, work or school, putting an end to the confusion over what can and cannot be recycled in different parts of the country. By 31 March 2026, local authorities will be required to collect all six recyclable waste streams - metal, plastic, glass, paper/card, food, and garden (where requested) - from all households in England. We will require recyclable plastic film to be collected from households and non-household municipal premises by 31 March 2027.

Extended Producer Responsibility payments will be provided to local authorities for the costs of collecting and managing household packaging waste through efficient and effective services. This includes the collection of additional packaging materials for recycling such as plastic films and flexibles.

■ **Plastics: Treaties**

Richard Burgon: [\[14659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with international counterparts on setting a target in the Global Plastics Treaty for reducing plastic production that aligns with the UK's climate targets.

Emma Hardy:

The UK is working closely with international counterparts to secure an ambitious treaty which covers the full lifecycle of plastics. Action to reduce the consumption and production of plastics will also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The UK is a member of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, a group of over 60 countries calling for an ambitious and effective treaty that will end plastic pollution by 2040, and is one of 42 countries that have signed the Bridge to Busan Declaration, a declaration which makes the case for an ambitious treaty that includes upstream measures to ensure sustainable consumption and production of primary plastic polymers.

Richard Burgon: [\[14660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the potential impact on greenhouse gas emissions of global adoption of the Bridge to Busan Declaration approach to the Global Plastics Treaty.

Emma Hardy:

The UK has signed the Bridge to Busan Declaration - a political declaration which makes the case for an ambitious treaty that includes upstream measures to ensure sustainable consumption and production of primary plastic polymers.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has modelled different policy scenarios for reducing plastic pollution to 2040, including a Global Ambition scenario, which simulates global action across the whole lifecycle of plastic, including on the production and consumption of plastic. This scenario could achieve a 41% reduction in plastics-related greenhouse gas emission levels compared with levels expected in 2040 under a business-as-usual policy course (1.7 GtCO₂e in 2040 versus 2.8 GtCO₂e in the baseline).

■ **Reservoirs: Havant**

Damian Hinds: [\[14595\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential (a) merits, (b) risks and (c) cost to the public purse of the proposed water transfer and recycling project at the Havant Thicket Reservoir.

Damian Hinds: [\[14596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of potential impact of the proposed water transfer and recycling project at the Havant Thicket Reservoir on Hampshire's chalk streams.

Damian Hinds: [\[14598\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential relevance of international comparisons of the potential (a) merits, (b) risks and (c) costs of proposals for recycling waste water in (i) Havant Thicket and (ii) elsewhere.

Damian Hinds: [\[14599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what guidance his Department issues on criteria for approval of a water transfer and recycling project.

Emma Hardy:

Southern Water are currently consulting on their Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP), which includes the proposed water transfer and recycling project at Havant Thicket Reservoir. Water regulators will review and scrutinise the plan to ensure it is fit for purpose, the risks to the environment including the impact on chalk streams are low, and it is value for money.

Options such as water recycling mark a transition to water supplies that are not dependent upon the uncertainties of rainfall. These options are well established elsewhere around the world and in the UK, to ensure resilient supplies in a changing climate.

For any water recycling scheme to proceed it must comply with the Water Environment Regulations (formally the Water Framework Directive) and the Habitats Regulations. The Environment Agency will ensure environmental requirements are met through their roles as statutory consultee of the planning process and regulator for environmental permits. Environmental impact assessments are required to support planning and permitting and appropriate mitigation must be provided for any impacts.

Damian Hinds: [\[14597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the Water Commission on the proposed water transfer and recycling project at the Havant Thicket Reservoir.

Emma Hardy:

The independent water commission, led by Sir Jon Cunliffe, will consult experts in areas like the environment, public health, engineering, customers, investors and economics, reporting to the Secretary of State for Environment and Wales' Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs by Q2 2025. The commission will consider the challenges the water sector faces as a whole

and use the evidence to set out recommendations that will help transform the sector. The Terms of Reference for the Independent Commission are available at GOV.UK.

■ Rivers: Pollution

Satvir Kaur:

[\[14854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to reduce agricultural run-off into rivers and streams.

Emma Hardy:

The levels of water pollution are unacceptable. Defra and its Arm's Length Bodies, continue to take action to tackle agricultural pollution through a suite of regulations, advice and incentives, and advice led enforcement, in order to achieve the Environment Act 2021 target, to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment from agriculture entering the water environment by 40% by 2038.

■ Water Companies: Employers' Contributions

Dr Ben Spencer:

[\[14792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with Ofwat on the potential impact of proposed changes to employers National Insurance contributions on the financial resilience of water companies.

Emma Hardy:

The Secretary of State has not had any discussion with Ofwat on the potential impact of changes to employer National Insurance contributions. Given the principle of regulatory independence, Ofwat conducts the price control review process at a distance from the Government. It would not be appropriate for the Government to interfere in this process.

As part of Ofwat's price review process, companies are given an allowance for their total expenditure. Ofwat expects companies to manage their costs within that allowance. Expenditure in excess of allowances may place pressure on a company's financial resilience, and this is an area that Ofwat closely monitors to ensure that companies are able to carry out their functions.

Ofwat will publish its final determinations for its 2024 price review in December, which will confirm the total expenditure for water companies for the next five years.

■ Water: Standards

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[15605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure high quality water in bathing water designated areas inland.

Emma Hardy:

Designated bathing waters are monitored by the Environment Agency (EA) throughout the bathing season which enables them to assess what action is needed to improve water quality. Sites which receive classifications of poor standard will be

subject to an action and improvement plan between the EA, local stakeholders and water companies. Defra also recently launched a consultation on reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013. The three core proposals details in this consultation seek to bring the designation and monitoring process in line with how bathing waters are used today, and ensure it is fit for purpose for inland sites.

Freddie van Mierlo: [\[15606\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of the powers of the Environmental Agency to (a) monitor and (b) maintain bathing water (i) status and (ii) quality.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) is the appropriate agency for monitoring and managing bathing waters in England. Their operational duties ensure the required testing and monitoring of bathing waters, and pollution risk forecasting during the bathing season. On 12 November, Defra also launched a consultation on reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013. This consultation detailed proposals that included moving the fixed dates of the bathing season from Regulations into guidance and considering a sites water quality prior to designation. These proposals would allow the EA greater flexibility when monitoring sites and a more targeted approach to maintaining their status and quality.

Freddie van Mierlo: [\[15607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has (a) held recent discussions with local stakeholders on (i) when bathing water status applications will reopen and (ii) the consultation of bathing water status and (b) taken recent steps to review the cost of applying to the bathing water scheme.

Emma Hardy:

Both Defra Ministers and officials have been engaging with stakeholders before and following the launch of the public consultation. Following this consultation and analysis of responses, we will consider the most appropriate time to reopen applications for new bathing water designations. Defra will publish new application guidance once the Regulations have been reformed and will ensure that there continues to be a clear and easy-to-understand process for applying for bathing water designation.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ China: Taiwan

Mr Connor Rand: [\[15096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the recommendations of the China Strategic Risks Institute's report entitled Mapping out the UK's response to grey zone escalations against Taiwan, published in May 2024.

Catherine West:

The UK has a clear interest in peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and has restated its importance alongside G7 partners. We consider the Taiwan issue one to be settled peacefully by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait through constructive dialogue, without the threat or use of force or coercion. We do not support any unilateral attempts to change the status quo. This includes increased Chinese assertiveness towards Taiwan. We support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations as a member where statehood is not a prerequisite, and as an observer or guest where it is.

Development Aid**Claire Hanna:**[\[15482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to increase the proportion of Overseas Development Assistance spent on development and humanitarian work overseas.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government is taking measures to reduce the asylum backlog and end the use of expensive hotel accommodation. We expect these plans to enable a greater proportion of the ODA budget to be spent on our international development priorities overseas. The FCDO's ODA programme budget, including the Integrated Security Fund, is planned to be £9.24 billion in 2025/26 - the highest level in recent years and an increase of around £450 million from 2024/25.

Development Aid: Climate Change**Dr Al Pinkerton:**[\[15127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to help ensure international climate finance reaches the (a) children and (b) communities most vulnerable to climate change.

Anneliese Dodds:

Our international climate finance continues to prioritise support to the most vulnerable communities who are experiencing the worst impacts of climate change, including children. For example, we will triple our funding for adaptation from £500 million in 2019 to £1.5 billion in 2025. In addition, we are committed to amplifying the voices of the most marginalised, empowering them as decision-makers, advocates and leaders in the climate response, ensuring gender and inclusion are a key part of our policy and programming. At COP29, I championed gender-responsive and inclusive international climate finance and policy, announcing over £5.8 million to support women's economic empowerment and in the context of insecurity created by the climate crisis.

■ Gaza: Israel**Liam Byrne:**[\[14913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024 to Question 8320 on Gaza: Israel, what role his Department's International Humanitarian Law Compliance Assessment Process Cell plays in the overall assessment of Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law; and if he will list the dates of each of the Cell's assessments since 4 July 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The FCDO's International Humanitarian Law Cell undertakes regular assessments of Israel's commitment and capability to comply with International Humanitarian Law in relation to the conflict in Gaza, in order to meet our legal obligations under the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (SELC). Since 4 July 2024 assessments were submitted on 24 July 2024 and 1 October 2024. Assessments continue to take place.

Richard Burgon:[\[14977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on (a) the conduct of the Israeli military in Gaza and (b) Israel's compliance with Article 1 of the Genocide Convention.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

It is the UK's long-standing policy that any determination of genocide should be based upon the judgement of a competent national or international court, and this is not for governments or non-judicial bodies to determine. This approach ensures that any determination is above politics, lobbying, and individual or national interest. The government fully respects the independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ is currently considering the application and interpretation of the Genocide Convention in the South Africa v Israel case, and we await its decision.

On 5 November, I raised our grave concerns that Kamal Adwan continues to come under fire with the Israeli Ambassador. We remain deeply concerned by reports that many medical facilities are no longer in use or are inaccessible to humanitarian actors. Israel must comply with international law. As the Foreign Secretary said in his statement on 16 October, we, alongside our partners, continue to press Israel to take all possible steps to avoid civilian casualties, allow aid into Gaza and enable the UN and its humanitarian partners to operate effectively. With our French and Algerian counterparts, we called an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council on this issue on 16 October.

■ Iran: Women**Manuela Perteghella:**[\[15054\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help tackle (a) violation of personal freedoms of female students and (b) other forms of mistreatment of women and girls in Iran.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Iran's human rights record is unacceptable. We condemn the continued repression of women and girls by the Iranian authorities. We maintain 94 human rights sanctions on senior Iranian decision makers, including those responsible for Iran's oppressive hijab law. We continue to support the UN Special Procedures of the Special Rapporteur and Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, mandates which are essential for spotlighting Iran's human rights violations, including against women and girls. We will continue to work alongside international partners to hold the Iranian regime accountable, including at the UN Third Committee this month.

■ Israel and Occupied Territories: Crime**Paula Barker:**[\[14086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a UN Investigative Team to (a) collect high-quality evidence on and (b) promote accountability for crimes committed in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories during the UK's Presidency of the UN Security Council.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern and prosecuting their perpetrators. The UK respects the independence of the ICC in its extant investigation of the situation in Israel and the OPTs. As we have consistently made clear, all parties must comply with International Humanitarian Law and take every possible step to minimise harm to civilians.

■ Laos: Christianity**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[14920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support persecuted Christians in Laos.

Catherine West:

The UK is committed to promoting and defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). The UK Embassy in Laos raises concerns about limitations on freedom of expression and other human rights issues, including freedom of religion, on a regular basis, both publicly and in private. We also work through the UN to promote and protect these rights, including raising country specific issues at the UN Human Rights Council.

■ Occupied Territories: Human Rights**Richard Burgon:**[\[14462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, on what date his Department received notice of the report of the United Nations General Assembly Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights

of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/79/363); and whether he had made an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of this report prior to his statement to the House on the Middle East of 28 October 2024.

Richard Burgon: [\[14463\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/79/363, 20 September 2024).

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Government has been clear since day one that International Humanitarian Law (IHL) must be upheld, and civilians protected. The UK supports Israel's right to self-defence, but it must do so in accordance with IHL. On his first day in office, the Foreign Secretary instigated a review of Israel's compliance with international law, and updated the House on 2 September 2024 on its conclusions and the actions the UK was taking in response. The death and destruction in Gaza is intolerable. Too many civilians have been killed and we need to prevent further bloodshed. What is urgently needed is an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the upholding of international law, protection of civilians including a rapid increase of aid into Gaza and a pathway to a two-state solution. The UK received the Report of the Special Committee upon its publication, alongside other UN Member States.

Ms Diane Abbott: [\[14577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the United Nations Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, published on 10 October 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We have considered the report. The Government has been clear since day one that International Humanitarian Law (IHL) must be upheld, and civilians protected. The UK supports Israel's right to self-defence, but it must do this in accordance with international humanitarian law. The death and destruction in Gaza is intolerable. Too many civilians have been killed and we need to prevent further bloodshed now. What is urgently needed is an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the upholding of international law, protection of civilians including a rapid increase in aid getting into Gaza, and a pathway to a two-state solution.

■ Pakistan: Political Prisoners

Jeremy Corbyn: [\[15165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to encourage the release of (a) Taj Muhammad Sarparah and (b) other Baloch citizens detained in Pakistan.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK strongly condemns any instances of enforced disappearances. We urge states to fully investigate any allegations, prosecute those responsible and provide justice to victims and their families. We continue to encourage progress towards the criminalisation of enforced disappearances in Pakistan. The British High Commission regularly raises these issues with the Government of Pakistan at a senior level. The UK will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all people as laid down in Pakistan's Constitution and in accordance with international standards.

■ Singapore and Taiwan: Cybersecurity**Mr Connor Rand:**[\[15097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the UK-Singapore cyber dialogue held in London on 13 June 2023; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of his Department holding similar discussions with counterparts in Taiwan.

Catherine West:

The UK-Singapore Cyber Dialogue held on 13 June 2023 in London was followed by a second iteration in Singapore from 12-13 June 2024. The Dialogues strengthen our close ties on cyber collaboration and align our approaches in cyber governance and tackling cyber threats.

The UK's longstanding position on Taiwan has not changed. We do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan but a strong, unofficial relationship with deep and growing ties in a range of areas, underpinned by shared democratic values.

■ Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief**Adam Jagee:**[\[15028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the Government plans to appoint a Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government will champion freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. No one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. As the Deputy Prime Minister said in Parliament on 20 November, envoy roles are under Ministerial consideration and will be decided upon in due course. We continue to use the strength of our global diplomatic network, including dedicated staff within the FCDO, to promote and protect FoRB around the world.

■ Taipei Representative Office in the UK

Alicia Kearns:

[\[15671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether officials from his Department have met representatives of the Taipei representative office in London in the last six months.

Catherine West:

FCDO officials have met regularly with representatives from the Taipei Representative Office in the last six months.

■ Undocumented Migrants

Mr Richard Quigley:

[\[15148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking with international partners to help tackle irregular migration to the UK.

Anneliese Dodds:

We engage regularly with our international partners on irregular migration, with a commitment to tackling people trafficking and the gangs profiting from it. In July we declared steps to reinforce our cooperation with Europol and announced up to £84 million for projects across Africa and the Middle East to address the reasons why people flee their homes. Through our new Border Security Command, we will also intensify efforts in transit countries to break the business models of these gangs including by disrupting the supply chains of small boat equipment and prosecuting those responsible.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Accident and Emergency Departments

Max Wilkinson:

[\[15075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to publish A&E waiting times by department rather than by Trust.

Karin Smyth:

Information on accident and emergency waiting times is published at a provider level, and is also disaggregated by the type of accident and emergency department, for instance type 1, 2, or 3.

■ Accident and Emergency Departments: Standards

Jess Brown-Fuller:

[\[15601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of ensuring that patients in NHS Accident and Emergency waiting rooms are frequently monitored by clinicians.

Karin Smyth:

Patients who attend emergency departments are triaged on arrival. This is a clinical assessment, often carried out by a registered nurse, to prioritise patients based on the urgency of their care. All National Health Service providers must have systems in place to appropriately manage clinical priority and patient safety within their emergency departments.

■ **Ambulance Services: Private Sector****Joe Robertson:**[\[15629\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the number of people employed by private ambulance services.

Joe Robertson:[\[15630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the number of people employed by private ambulance services that have provided services to the NHS in the last 12 months.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold information on the number of people employed by private ambulance services.

■ **Ambulance Services: Standards****Dr Caroline Johnson:**[\[15263\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average ambulance response time was for each category in each of the last 24 months.

Karin Smyth:

The following table shows the national mean average ambulance service response times in England, in minutes and broken down by category, in each of the last 24 months:

YEAR	MONTH	CATEGORY 1 MEAN	CATEGORY 2 MEAN	CATEGORY 3 MEAN	CATEGORY 4 MEAN
2022	November	0:09:26	0:48:10	2:42:14	3:21:43
2022	December	0:10:58	1:32:55	4:18:16	4:34:56
2023	January	0:08:30	0:32:06	1:26:09	1:48:46
2023	February	0:08:30	0:32:20	1:42:39	2:12:24
2023	March	0:08:49	0:39:33	2:13:39	2:51:49
2023	April	0:08:07	0:28:33	1:30:54	1:54:17
2023	May	0:08:17	0:32:22	1:46:10	2:20:15

YEAR	MONTH	CATEGORY 1 MEAN	CATEGORY 2 MEAN	CATEGORY 3 MEAN	CATEGORY 4 MEAN
2023	June	0:08:41	0:36:47	2:05:38	2:45:28
2023	July	0:08:21	0:31:49	1:50:11	2:21:31
2023	August	0:08:17	0:31:30	1:45:27	2:07:18
2023	September	0:08:31	0:37:39	2:16:04	2:41:45
2023	October	0:08:41	0:41:43	2:31:14	2:51:00
2023	November	0:08:31	0:38:30	2:16:32	2:36:57
2023	December	0:08:44	0:45:57	2:37:12	2:55:53
2024	January	0:08:25	0:40:06	2:12:53	2:42:45
2024	February	0:08:25	0:36:20	2:04:15	2:33:06
2024	March	0:08:20	0:33:50	2:03:47	2:29:48
2024	April	0:08:10	0:30:22	1:42:13	2:03:16
2024	May	0:08:16	0:32:44	2:00:00	2:21:11
2024	June	0:08:21	0:34:38	2:02:34	2:20:58
2024	July	0:08:15	0:33:25	2:01:21	2:21:47
2024	August	0:08:03	0:27:25	1:30:33	1:56:10
2024	September	0:08:25	0:36:02	2:12:54	2:32:51
2024	October	0:08:38	0:42:15	2:41:28	2:57:18

Source: the data is published by NHS England, and is available at the following link:
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ambulance-quality-indicators/>

■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Drugs

Carla Denyer:

[15361]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the oral contribution by the Minister for Secondary Care of 19 November 2024, Official Report, column 146, whether she has sought commitments from the suppliers of medicines; and what the remaining issues are.

Karin Smyth:

Following on from my answer to the question raised at health oral topical questions by the Hon. Member of Parliament for Gravesham, Dr Lauren Sullivan about the

shortages of medications for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), I would like to confirm that the Department has been working hard with industry and NHS England to help resolve supply issues with some ADHD medicines, which are affecting the United Kingdom and other countries around the world. As a result of intensive work, some issues have been resolved and all strengths of lisdexamfetamine, atomoxetine capsules, and guanfacine prolonged-release tablets are now available.

We are continuing to work to resolve supply issues, where they remain, for methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets. We are engaging with all suppliers of methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets to assess the challenges faced and their actions to address them. We are also directing suppliers to secure additional stocks, expedite deliveries where possible, and review plans to further build capacity to support continued growth in demand for the short and long-term. We expect the supply to improve in the UK throughout the rest of 2024. However, we anticipate supply to be limited for some strengths and we continue to work with all suppliers to ensure the remaining issues are resolved as soon as possible. To improve supply chain resiliency, we are also working with prospective new suppliers of methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets to expand the UK supplier base.

We are supporting an ADHD taskforce that NHS England is establishing to examine ADHD service provision. The taskforce will bring together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the National Health Service, education, and justice, to help provide a joined-up approach in response to concerns around rising demand. In collaboration with NHS England's national ADHD data improvement plan, we plan to combine modelling for future growth forecasts, which will be shared with industry to improve demand forecasting for ADHD medicines.

To minimise the impact of the shortages on patients, the Department has worked with specialist clinicians, including those within the NHS, to develop management advice for NHS clinicians to consider prescribing available alternative brands of methylphenidate prolonged release tablets or available alternative ADHD medicines. We would expect ADHD service providers and specialists to follow our guidance, which includes offering rapid response to primary care teams seeking urgent advice or opinion for the management of patients, including those known to be at a higher risk of adverse impact because of these shortages.

To aid ADHD service providers and prescribers further we have widely disseminated our communications, and continually update a list of currently available and unavailable ADHD products on the Specialist Pharmacy Service website, helping ensure that those involved in the prescribing and dispensing of ADHD medications can make informed decisions with patients.

■ Carer's Allowance

Marie Goldman: [\[15360\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of levels of carers pay.

Stephen Kinnock:

Adult social care is a historically low paid sector, as most care workers are paid at or just above the National Living Wage. The recently introduced Employment Rights Bill aims to address this by establishing a framework for Fair Pay Agreements, through which an agreement on pay and other terms and conditions for the adult social care sector can be negotiated and reached by employers, worker representatives, and others in partnership.

■ Cervical Cancer: Screening

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[15257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to increase uptake of cervical screenings.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 25 November 2024]: I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 October 2024 to Question 8464.

■ Coeliac Disease: Gluten-free Foods

Clive Jones: [\[15343\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to improve access to gluten-free staple foods for patients with coeliac disease by (a) improving the availability of those foods on prescription and (b) providing financial support to assist patients on obligatory gluten-free diets.

Karin Smyth:

The national prescribing position in England remains that gluten free bread and mixes can be provided to all coeliac patients on a National Health Service prescription, and a wide range of these items continue to be listed in part XV of the Drug Tariff. This means that prescribers can issue NHS prescriptions based on the individual preferences of their patients, while also being mindful of which product best suits the patient's dietary needs.

I recognise the pressures people are facing with the rising cost of living. Our extensive arrangements to help people afford NHS prescription charges means that almost 89% of prescription items in England are already provided free of charge. For those who are not exempt from charges, pre-payment certificates can be used to cap costs at just over £2 a week for regular prescriptions.

■ Dentistry: Lincolnshire

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[15275\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a dental school in Lincolnshire.

Stephen Kinnock:

It is for individual universities to decide whether they wish to establish a dental school. Before a university, such as the University of Lincoln, can apply to receive Government-funded dental school places, it needs to have met the requirements of the General Dental Council, the Office for Students and obtained "dental authority status" from the Privy Council. The Office for Students has statutory responsibility for allocating dental school places.

We will be working with NHS England to assess the need for more dental trainees in areas such as Lincolnshire, where we know that many people are struggling to find a National Health Service dentist.

■ Doctors: Pay

John Glen:

[\[14631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 22 October 2024 to Question 8130 on Public Sector: Pay, what the gross cost was of the doctors pay deal.

Karin Smyth:

The resident doctors accepted the Government's pay offer to provide an additional pay uplift worth an average of 4.05% on top of their existing pay award for 2023/24, which has an estimated gross cost to the Department of approximately £350 million per year.

■ Down's Syndrome

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[15264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) fetuses, (b) infants and (c) children have been diagnosed with trisomy 21 in each of the last five years.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 25 November 2024]: The National Disease Registration Service in NHS England collects and quality assures data about people with congenital anomalies and rare diseases across the whole of England. The service does not hold data in the relevant form for children.

The following table shows the requested information for fetuses and infants between 2018 and 2021, the period for which complete data is available:

BIRTH YEAR	NUMBER OF BABIES BORN ALIVE	NUMBER OF BABIES STILLBORN	NUMBER OF TERMINATIONS	NUMBER OF LATE MISCARRIAGES	NUMBER OF FETUSES	TOTAL NUMBER OF BABIES AND FETUSES WITH T21
2018	731	31	803	12	815	1,577
2019	685	28	838	9	847	1,560
2020	673	35	839	16	855	1,563
2021	700	24	1,049	12	1,061	1,785

Source: NCARDS Congenital Anomaly Official Statistics Report, 2021

Notes:

1. Born alive means a baby showing signs of life at birth as recorded by the Office for National Statistics.
2. Stillbirths are pregnancy outcomes after 24 complete weeks' gestation which result in the baby's death by the time of birth.
3. Terminations are terminations of pregnancy regardless of gestation or civil registration status. Some of the babies shown in this table may have more than one condition, so may not have had a termination for the condition shown.
4. Late miscarriages are pregnancy outcomes between 20 and just under 24 weeks' gestation which result in the death of the baby.

■ Endometriosis: Health Education

Sarah Green:

[9797]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help increase public awareness of the symptoms of thoracic endometriosis.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 23 October 2024]: The Government recognises the significant challenges faced by women with endometriosis, and is committed to prioritising women's health as we reform the National Health Service. Information for the public on endometriosis symptoms and treatments can be found on the NHS YouTube channel and the NHS website, which are available, respectively, at the following two links:

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

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/endometriosis/>

Although at present thoracic endometriosis is not specifically mentioned on these pages, the NHS website's endometriosis page links to further resources, including the

Endometriosis UK website. The Endometriosis UK website includes information on endometriosis outside the pelvis and highlights questions that a patient can ask in secondary care, as well as the option of referral for a second opinion. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/getting-diagnosed-0>

The Endometriosis UK website also includes an informational video on thoracic endometriosis, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/webinar/thoracic-endometriosis>

■ Euthanasia

Sir John Hayes:

[14582]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to publish a review of the potential costs to the NHS of changes to the law on assisted dying.

Stephen Kinnock:

There is no review of the potential costs to the National Health Service of changes to the law on assisted dying and accordingly, there are no plans to publish a review.

■ Health Services: Digital Technology

Mark Swards:

[15406]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that people with additional communication needs are able to access (a) online appointment bookings and (b) other digital healthcare services.

Karin Smyth:

All National Health Service organisations and publicly funded social care providers in England are required to meet the Accessible Information Standard to meet the communication needs of patients and carers with a disability, impairment, or sensory loss.

Patients are able to request general practice appointments and manage secondary care appointments through local online tools and the NHS App, which can also be accessed through a web browser. The NHS App is designed to meet international accessibility standards and the services are routinely tested with a range of people with accessibility issues. User reviews and research show the NHS App and website to be highly usable and simple to use. Local online tools must also meet minimum accessibility standards.

Digital healthcare services are part of a multi-channel offering, and patients unable to use digital channels can continue to access services via telephone and through traditional face to face services. Digital services must be designed to alleviate healthcare inequalities rather than exacerbate them. Our goal is to ensure that reducing healthcare inequalities and improving digital inclusion have due focus in wider inclusive user design and delivery for all digital health products and services, including through implementation of the NHS England Digital Inclusion Framework.

■ Health Services: Disability**Marsha De Cordova:** [\[13273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 2 September 2024 to Question 2469 on Health Services: Disability, when he expects NHS England's review of the Accessible Information Standard to be published.

Stephen Kinnock:

We understand how vital it is to ensure that the communication needs of patients and carers with a disability, impairment or sensory loss are met by health services. A revised AIS is being reviewed with a view to publication once it has been through NHS England's internal assurance and governance processes. NHS England are also working on ensuring accessible versions are available at the point of publication.

While we do not yet have a confirmed publication date, the current AIS remains in force and therefore, there should not be a gap in provision for people using services. NHS England is also continuing to work to support implementation of the AIS with awareness raising, communication and engagement, and a review of the current e-learning modules on the AIS.

■ Health Services: Foreign Nationals**Rupert Lowe:** [\[13069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what charges were issued to non-UK residents of what nationalities not entitled to free secondary healthcare by the James Paget NHS trust for each treatment in each of the last three financial years; and how much of that amount was recovered in each of those last three financial years.

Karin Smyth:

The Department of Health and Social Care does not collect the information requested.

■ Health Services: Hertfordshire**Daisy Cooper:** [\[15262\]](#)

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

Karin Smyth:

The Government recognises that delivering high quality healthcare services in the National Health Service requires the right facilities and support systems in the right places. We understand that investment in capital projects, whether through allocations prioritised locally or through national programmes, is important in achieving this, but such investment must be strategic and offer value for money.

West Hertfordshire is served by the Watford General Hospital which is in scope of the review into the New Hospital Programme. My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State

for Health and Social Care, will set out further details of the outcome of the review in due course, alongside a new delivery schedule for the Programme.

Managing the local capital budget for its area, reconfiguring services including to address estates issues, and allocating funds according to local priorities, such as investment to support healthcare services, are matters for the local NHS organisations. The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board received almost £65 million in operational capital funding in 2023/24 to support NHS services across the region, including West Hertfordshire.

■ **Health Services: Leeds**

Mark Swards:

[15405]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of implementing the recommendations of the briefing paper by Healthwatch Leeds entitled Communicating change, published in September 2024.

Mark Swards:

[15407]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will hold discussions with Healthwatch Leeds on the potential merits of implementing their policy on communication, coordination and compassion in other parts of the country.

Karin Smyth:

While there are no current plans for my Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, to meet with Healthwatch Leeds, he does meet with stakeholders regularly about a range of issues.

NHS England has carefully considered the points raised in Healthwatch Leeds' paper, in particular its recommendations for how providers and commissioners should communicate change to people and their communities. In 2022, NHS England published statutory guidance on working with people and communities, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/working-in-partnership-with-people-and-communities-statutory-guidance/>

This guidance supports integrated care boards (ICBs) and providers to meet their legal duties to involve the public in changes to services, and highlights the importance of communicating effectively with communities. NHS England carries out an annual assessment of ICBs, which includes how they meet their public involvement legal duty.

■ **Hospital Beds: Foreign Nationals**

Rupert Lowe:

[15620]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 14365 on Hospital Beds: Foreign Nationals, if she will make

an assessment of the potential merits of collecting data on the occupation of hospital beds by chargeable overseas visitors.

Karin Smyth:

There are no plans to collect this data centrally; it is for National Health Service trusts to manage bed occupancy regardless of whether the patient is chargeable or not.

■ **Hospitals: Grants**

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[14273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Children's Hospital Grant will be (a) centrally distributed, (b) ringfenced and (c) take account of the recent proposed increase in employers National Insurance contributions.

Stephen Kinnock:

2023/24 was the final year of the Children's Hospice Grant. In 2024/25, however, NHS England provided £25 million of funding for children and young people's hospices, maintaining the level of funding from 2023/24.

For the first time, however, this funding was transacted by integrated care boards (ICBs), on behalf of NHS England, rather than being centrally administered as before. I am aware that the shift to dissemination via ICBs for 2024/25 has not been as smooth a transition as I would have hoped, and the Department and NHS England are learning the lessons from that experience.

We do understand that, financially, times are difficult for many voluntary and charitable organisations, including children's hospices, due to a range of concurrent cost pressures.

I met NHS England, Together for Short Lives, and one of the chairs of the Children Who Need Palliative Care All-Party Parliamentary Group to discuss children's palliative and end of life care, and this funding stream was discussed at length at that meeting. We are working very closely with NHS England to get the funding arrangements for 2025/26 confirmed as a matter of urgency.

On the increase in employer National Insurance contributions, we have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at Autumn Budget 2024, which enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26.

The employer National Insurance rise will be implemented in April 2025. We will set out further plans in due course, including through NHS Planning Guidance.

■ **Independent Healthcare Providers Network: Correspondence**

Kim Johnson:

[\[14713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent correspondence he has received from David Hare, Chief Executive of the Independent Healthcare Providers Network.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has received several pieces of ministerial correspondence from the Independent Healthcare Providers Network (IHPN) since the Government came into office. These have related to how the independent sector can support the Government's commitment to return to the 18-week NHS Constitutional standard, improving patient safety, and invitations to attend the IHPN's annual conference.

The Department receives and welcomes ministerial correspondence from a range of key partners including think tanks, academics, patient groups, and other relevant bodies who can work with us to deliver on our commitments. The independent sector providers that the IHPN represents have a role to play in our key commitment of tackling waiting lists, using any additional capacity to tackle the backlog whilst still providing care that is free at the point of use and delivers value for money.

■ IVF: Asylum**Rupert Lowe:**[\[12869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many NHS IVF treatments were provided to asylum seekers in each of the last five years.

Karin Smyth:

Neither the Department nor NHS England holds data on who accesses IVF treatment. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority publishes information on the numbers and IVF cycles carried out, including whether they were privately or NHS funded, but this does not cover the immigration status of the patient.

■ Liver Diseases**Dr Rupa Huq:**[\[15195\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve rates of (a) prevention and (b) early diagnosis of liver disease.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department is aware of the burden of undiagnosed liver disease in the population, and its impact on health and the working years of life lost.

Community Liver Health Checks are being piloted in 19 areas to identify patients with cirrhosis or advanced fibrosis, who are at high risk of hepatocellular carcinomas (HCC). These patients will be referred into, and supported to engage with, National Institute for Care and Excellence recommended six-monthly liver cancer surveillance. Many of the patients identified by this route will also receive lifestyle advice and support which aims to reduce future cancer incidence. From June 2022 to October 2024, over 80,000 fibroscans have been delivered and over 5,600 people have been referred for cancer surveillance.

The Community Liver Health Checks programme is also funding a primary care case finding pilot, which uses primary care records to identify patients at high risk of cirrhosis, and offers them blood tests and fibroscans. The pilots are due to finish in

December 2024. To date, over 12,400 people have been tested, and 288 people have been identified to have advanced liver disease requiring cancer surveillance.

More widely, NHS England is also focussed on developing pathways for the early diagnosis of fatty liver disease, and prevention via the work to reduce hepatitis C and B infections and to reduce obesity rates. In addition, the NHS Cancer Programme is working to detect more HCCs, the most common liver cancer, at an early stage, when the chances of survival are higher.

■ Medical Records

Mark Pritchard: [\[14957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to create shared patient records to allow (a) NHS clinical teams and (b) social care providers to access patient health and social care records.

Karin Smyth:

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has announced the intention for there to be a single patient record that both empowers patients, by giving them access to their records, and gives professionals access to the information they need to make the best-informed decisions when delivering care and treatment. We have begun engaging with the public to help shape our plans, including what information they would want to see included in a single record.

■ Medical Treatments

Joe Robertson: [\[14832\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that medical treatment is only provided in appropriate medical settings.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and social care provision in England.

Providers carrying on regulated activities must provide information about the locations from which these regulated activities will be managed from or delivered at, when registering with the CQC. If agreed, these locations are subsequently listed on the providers certificate of registration as conditions of their registration. The CQC can act on any breach of information relating to a provider's registration.

Any services, care or treatment being offered outside of the regulated activities would be beyond the CQC's remit.

■ Medical Treatments: Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe: [\[14728\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many private provider contracts have been commissioned by the NHS to treat irregular migrants each of the last ten years; and what the cost to the public purse was of those contracts.

Karin Smyth:

The Home Office and its contractors work closely with the National Health Service, local authorities, and non-governmental organisations to ensure that people can access the health care and support they need. All asylum seeker accommodation providers have a duty and requirement to assist people who need it to access healthcare systems in their local area. The Department of Health and Social Care does not hold information on the services commissioned by the Home Office.

Mental Health Services: Finance**Neil Coyle:**[\[14932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to maintain levels of mental health spending in line with planned increases in other NHS spending in (a) the next financial year and (b) the future.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 25 November 2024]: The NHS Operational and Planning Guidance for 2024/25 makes clear that integrated care boards are expected to continue to meet the Mental Health Investment Standard by increasing their investment in mental health services in line with their overall increase in funding for the year.

Further details on mental health spending for 2025/26 will be set out in the NHS Operational and Planning Guidance for 2025/26, following which we will provide an update to Parliament.

Mental Health Services: Neurological Diseases**Sarah Hall:**[\[14716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that NHS mental health services do not exclude anyone because of a neurological diagnosis.

Stephen Kinnock:

Access to National Health Service mental health services is based on clinical need, including for patients with a neurological diagnosis.

More broadly, we know that too many people with mental health issues are not getting the support or care they need, which is why we will fix the broken system to ensure we give mental health the same attention and focus as physical health, and that people, including those with a neurological diagnosis, can be confident in accessing high quality mental health support when they need it.

Mental Health Services: Rural Areas**Stuart Anderson:**[\[14980\]](#)

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

Stephen Kinnock:

Integrated care boards are responsible for providing health and care services to meet the needs of their local populations. We plan to recruit an additional 8,500 mental health workers across children and adult mental health services in England to reduce delays and provide faster treatment.

The Suicide Prevention Strategy for England 2023-2028, published September 2023, sets out an ambition to conduct and commission research and data linkage projects, including supporting the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to look at agricultural workers to understand the unique challenges in that occupational group and respond appropriately.

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.

■ Midwives: Students**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[14925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much was spent on encouraging students to take on the career path of midwifery in the last five years.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England has several initiatives which support the encouragement of students to take on the career pathway of midwifery.

To remove barriers to training in clinical roles, including midwifery, eligible students receive a non-repayable grant of £5,000 a year through the Learning Support Fund.

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

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

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

Due to the national and regional aspects of funding, NHS England is unable to provide a total cost for individual midwifery promotion spend.

■ NHS: Buildings

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[15380]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an estimate of the total value of unused NHS estate per region.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England collects data on the potential value of surplus land on a national, not regional, basis.

Quarter 4 of the National Health Service's 2023/24 annual report on surplus land showed that 128 plots of land were surplus, with the landowner actively seeking to dispose of the plot, whilst 199 plots were classified as potentially surplus, meaning the plot could be declared surplus by the landowner subject to identified issues or constraints being resolved. The estimated sales receipt for surplus or potentially surplus land stands at £830 million, but the investment required to unlock this potential would be £1.8 billion. Further details on NHS surplus land are available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-surplus-land/quarter-4-2023-24>.

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 October 2024 to Question [8599](#) for the information held on the cost of unoccupied whole sites. NHS England's definition of unoccupied sites covers empty spaces, those not in use, and those closed awaiting disposal, and includes hospitals, health centres, mental health hubs, stores and warehouses, and administrative buildings.

■ NHS: Disease Control

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[15215]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of NHS preparedness for a pandemic.

Andrew Gwynne:

Ensuring the United Kingdom is prepared for a future pandemic is a top priority for the Government, and the Department continuously reviews and updates our pandemic preparedness to reflect the latest scientific information, lessons learned from exercises, and our response to previous emergencies.

The Department is working with NHS England, the UK Health Security Agency, and its partners across the health and care system to maintain a flexible and scalable set of capabilities which can be adapted to respond to any future threats, across all routes of infectious disease transmission. The Department's approach to pandemic preparedness also takes into account the underlying resilience of the health and care system.

NHS England is an active participant in this work and has made several improvements that will help resilience in a future pandemic, including on the coordination and escalation of a national healthcare response, high consequence

infectious disease and infectious disease capacity, and critical care capacity, surge and transfer plans.

■ **NHS: Finance**

Richard Tice: [14786]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much and what proportion of NHS funding was spent on (a) administration and (b) patient care in the latest period for which data is available.

Karin Smyth:

Patient care is too broad a category and could encompass a wide range of spending. We are unable to break this down as it stands. However, the total administration spend for NHS England and the integrated care boards is available on page 177 of NHS England's Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24, which is available at the following link:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6709344a92bb81fcdbe7b728/nhs-england-annual-report-and-accounts-2023-to-2024.pdf>

■ **NHS: Migrant Workers**

Richard Tice: [16100]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on (a) the total cost of recruitment fees for employing overseas workers and (b) the average recruitment cost for each overseas employee incurred by NHS trusts in each of the past three years.

Richard Tice: [16101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the cost to the public purse was of training NHS staff recruited from abroad in the last 12 months.

Karin Smyth:

The information requested on the cost of recruitment fees, the average recruitment cost, and the cost of training for National Health Service staff recruited from overseas is not collected centrally.

■ **NHS: Take-up**

Freddie van Mierlo: [15553]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the uptake of (a) digital innovation and (b) patient data systems within the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England is working closely with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and the Accelerated Access Collaborative to improve the process for uptake of innovative digital health technologies in the National Health Service. This includes working with

healthcare professionals and other key stakeholders to understand what matters to them.

The Federated Data Platform (FDP) is being rolled out to all trusts and integrated care systems which wish to use it, to bring together data in different local systems, to allow better co-ordination of care to patients. All trusts and integrated care boards (ICBs) are being asked to provide plans for how they will maximise the benefits of the NHS FDP for their patients in the next two years.

The Shared Care Record programme set the target that by the end of September 2021, ICBs across the country would have a basic shared record in place. As of March 2022, all 42 ICBs in England have at least a basic shared care record.

My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, has announced the intention for there to be a single patient record that both empowers patients by giving them access to their records and gives professionals access to the information they need to make the best-informed decisions when delivering care and treatment. We have begun engaging with the public to help shape our plans, including what information they would want to see included in a single record.

■ NHS: Translation Services

Rupert Lowe:

[\[15631\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the answer of 14 November to Question 14378 on NHS Translation Services what the (a) cost for translation of and (b) percentage of communications in each language in e-RS communication letters was in each of the last five years.

Karin Smyth:

The e-RS translated letters are based on standard templates, so NHS England only pays translation costs when the templates change, or when they add additional languages. The cost incurred in the last five years is £4,213, which breaks down as:

¾ £780 as of June 2019, with 10 languages;

¾ £1,593 as of June 2023, with 25 languages; and

¾ £1,840 as of January 2024, with 25 languages.

In addition, the following table shows the total letters sent and the proportion of translated letters sent each year since April 2019, at a summary level:

YEAR	TOTAL E-RS LETTERS	TOTAL TRANSLATED
2019/20	3,050,546	3.88%
2020/21	1,056,218	3.78%
2021/22	1,454,061	4.24%
2022/23	1,496,427	4.45%

YEAR	TOTAL E-RS LETTERS	TOTAL TRANSLATED
2023/24	1,147,543	6.92%
2024/25	689,934	8.09%

Note: for 2024, the data is not for the whole year, but for the year to date.

■ North Devon Hospital

Ian Roome:

[\[15599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will hold discussions with the NHS England Investment Committee on the time it has taken to review the business case for North Devon District Hospital.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 26 November 2024]: The Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is currently developing their Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the new North Devon District Hospital scheme. Following approval of their SOC, they will need to develop their Outline Business Case, and then a Full Business Case, prior to commencing construction as soon as possible, as is usual for large infrastructure projects.

The New Hospital Programme Investment Committee met in November 2024 and considered the business case put forward by the trust for accommodation on the site. However, the committee recommended that the trust address several conditions for approval. We are working with the trust on options to resubmit the case to the committee in December 2024.

■ Nurses

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[15272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of people with a nursing qualification working in the NHS are not in patient-facing roles.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold the information requested.

Danny Beales:

[\[15538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support the nursing workforce.

Karin Smyth:

The Government values nurses and is committed to supporting them as a profession, and in their everyday working lives. The Government accepted the pay recommendations of the NHS Pay Review Body for 2024/25 in full, providing a 5.5% consolidated pay uplift for 2024/25, backdated to 1 April, to approximately 1.4 million staff in England. A significant amount of work has also gone into developing a set of

non-pay recommendations on measures to support the Agenda for Change workforce. This includes specific recommendations on improving career progression for the nursing workforce.

Targeted retention work for nurses and midwives is also being undertaken by NHS England and led by the Chief Nursing Officer. This includes the introduction of a nursing and midwifery retention self-assessment tool, a national preceptorship framework which provides early career support for nurses and midwives, and mentoring schemes.

It is essential that all National Health Service staff, including nurses, can work in a supportive and compassionate environment that recognises and prioritises health and wellbeing. NHS England has a wide-ranging package of mental health and wellbeing support for all staff.

■ Nurses: Students

Danny Beales:

[\[15540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support student nurses.

Karin Smyth:

To supplement the student loan support provided by the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care provides non-repayable and non-income assessed funding via the NHS Learning Support Fund. All eligible nursing students receive a grant of £5,000 per academic year. Additional funding of £1,000 per year is also available for those studying certain course, for example, Mental Health Nursing and Learning Disabilities Nursing, with a further £2,000 per year for childcare, as well as support for placement travel and accommodation costs. Students in exceptional hardship can also access up to a further £3,000 per year.

■ Nurses: Universities

Danny Beales:

[\[15539\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of trends in the levels of applications to nursing university courses.

Karin Smyth:

The following table shows the number of applicants, by the June deadline, to undergraduate nursing courses, for all domiciles, in England, each year from 2019 to 2024:

YEAR	APPLICANTS
2019	31,780
2020	37,990
2021	45,740

YEAR	APPLICANTS
2022	43,170
2023	36,400
2024	33,560

Source: published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), available at the following link:

<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2024-cycle/2024-cycle-applicant-figures-30-june-deadline>

Final applicant numbers for the 2024 cycle will be published by UCAS before the end of the year. The drop in nursing applicants follows the unprecedented demand for healthcare courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the number of applicants continues to outstrip the places on offer. Nursing training places are competitive, and lead to an attractive and important career in the National Health Service.

We are working closely with NHS England, universities, and UCAS to ensure that everyone who wants to pursue a rewarding healthcare career in nursing has the support and opportunities to do so.

■ **Pectus Excavatum: Surgery**

Mike Martin: **[15347]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Haller index threshold for pectus excavatum surgery provided on the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

In April 2023, NHS England published an interim clinical commissioning urgent policy statement on pectus excavatum surgery. The statement concluded that the Haller Index, a mathematical calculation used to measure the severity of the deformity, is adequate and serves as a key component of the eligibility criteria for surgery, alongside measures of severe physiological impact.

The policy statement is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/interim-clinical-commissioning-urgent-policy-statement-pectus-surgery/>

■ **Physician Associates: Finance and Incentives**

Freddie van Mierlo: **[15552]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will review the (a) incentives and (b) funding for physician associates.

Karin Smyth:

There is no current plan to review the funding for Physician Associates' (PAs) training or pay. The Government has commissioned an independent review on the PA and Anaesthesia Associate professions. This review will consider the safety of the roles, and their contribution to multidisciplinary teams.

■ Physician Associates: Training**Freddie van Mierlo:**[\[15551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of (a) patient knowledge of the training physicians associates receive and (b) information available in general practice for patients on physician associates.

Karin Smyth:

On 20 November 2024, the Government announced that it is establishing an independent review of the physician associate and anaesthesia associate professions. It will consider the safety of the roles, and their contribution to multidisciplinary healthcare teams. The review will report in spring 2025.

The introduction of regulation by the General Medical Council (GMC) will provide a standardised framework of governance and assurance for the clinical practice of Physician Associates (PAs) and make it easier for employers, patients, and the public to understand the relationship between these roles and that of doctors.

As set out in the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidelines, all healthcare professionals directly involved in a patient's care should introduce themselves and explain their role to the patient. The GMC has published interim standards for PAs in advance of regulation, which make it clear that professionals should always introduce their role to patients, and set out their responsibilities in the team. In primary care, NHS England has produced patient-facing materials that have been shared widely with general practices to support patient awareness and understanding of the PA role.

■ Protective Clothing: Storage**Rupert Lowe:**[\[15594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 13915 on Protective Clothing: Storage, which companies have contracts to store personal protective equipment unsuitable for National Health Service use.

Karin Smyth:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave the Hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon on 15 November 2024, to Question [12461](#).

■ Radioisotopes

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[\[15266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the availability of medical radioisotopes.

Karin Smyth:

Supply of radioisotopes that were in short supply in recent weeks has now returned to normal levels and a Written Ministerial Statement was laid on 26 November 2024 to update Parliament. During the disruption to supply, the Department worked with industry, devolved Governments, the National Health Service, members of the radiopharmaceutical community and regulators to secure fair and equal access across the United Kingdom and ensure that patients with critical needs were given priority.

■ Respiratory Diseases

Josh Babarinde:

[\[15529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will ensure that (a) chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and (b) other lung health issues feature in the 10-year NHS plan.

Andrew Gwynne:

The 10-Year Health Plan will consider the change needed to meet the three health mission goals, which are: a fairer system where everyone lives well for longer; a National Health Service that is there when people need it; and fewer lives lost to the biggest killers.

We will carefully be considering policies with input from the public, patients, health staff, and our stakeholders as we develop the plan.

■ Respiratory Diseases: The Wrekin

Mark Pritchard:

[\[14958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps she is taking to help increase the proportion of patients that receive treatment within 18 weeks of referral for a respiratory condition in The Wrekin constituency.

Karin Smyth:

Tackling waiting lists is a key part of our Health Mission and a top priority for the Government, including waits for respiratory conditions. We are committed to achieving the NHS Constitutional standard that 92% of patients should wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment.

Funding announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 will support the delivery of an additional two million operations, scans, and appointments during the Government's first year as a First Step in our commitment to ensuring patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks. Further details regarding the additional appointments will be confirmed in due course.

■ Tuberculosis: Vaccination

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[15274]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the uptake of Bacillus Calmette-Guérin vaccine among eligible infants.

Andrew Gwynne:

Official vaccine coverage estimates for the Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine are measured for eligible children at three months and 12 months old, and are published quarterly by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), and annually by NHS England. The UKHSA's quarterly figures and NHS England's annual figures are available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cover-of-vaccination-evaluated-rapidly-cover-programme-2024-to-2025-quarterly-data>

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-immunisation-statistics/england-2023-24>

The latest data captures BCG coverage at the age of three months old for children born 1 January to 31 March 2024, and at 12 months old for children born 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023. Measured at three months, coverage in England was 77.4%, and measured at 12 months, it was 84.5%.

■ Vaccination: Children

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[15216]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve the uptake of routine childhood immunisations.

Andrew Gwynne:

In England, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) works closely with NHS England, the Department, and wider health system partners at the national, regional, and local levels to improve uptake of the routine childhood immunisations and catch-up children who missed out.

The first UKHSA Childhood Immunisation communication campaign, encouraging parents to ensure their child's vaccinations were up to date, ran from 4 March until mid-April 2024. The most recent campaign ran from 26 August until 4 October 2024.

To raise awareness of potential vaccination benefits and increase awareness of the programmes the UKHSA also provides a comprehensive suite of public facing resources, including information leaflets in multiple languages and accessible formats, for instance easy read, British Sign Language, and braille, and provides comprehensive clinical guidance, including e-learning programmes and training, for healthcare professionals.

■ Ventilation: Public Places**Adrian Ramsay:****[15595]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with public health stakeholders on ventilation in publicly provided spaces to assess (a) transmission of airborne diseases and (b) air quality; and if he will take steps to provide (i) funding and (ii) logistical support to ensure the safe ventilation of publicly provided spaces.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Chief Medical Officer's 2022 annual report on air pollution highlighted indoor air quality as a significant issue for public health. The Department engages both across Government and externally on air quality and health. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has published guidance on the ventilation of indoor spaces to reduce the spread of respiratory infections, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ventilation-to-reduce-the-spread-of-respiratory-infections-including-covid-19>

The UKHSA also has a Cleaner Air Programme, which includes efforts to increase the evidence base and raise awareness of indoor air quality and its health impacts, especially in settings like homes, schools, and public places. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has published guidance on indoor air quality in residential buildings which outlines steps that can be taken to mitigate health risks. These guidelines are available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng149>

The funding of logistical support for public spaces is generally the responsibility of the authority that owns and operates those spaces.

HOME OFFICE**■ Asylum: Hotels****Gregory Stafford:****[15608]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the oral contribution by the Minister for Border Security and Asylum to the Urgent Question on Asylum Seekers: Hotel Accommodation of 20 November 2024, Official Report, column 279, whether she plans to publish statistics that include reference to the 10,000 returns in the last period.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The statistic that I referred to in the question referenced an [ad-hoc statistical release](#) published by the Home Office on 4 November containing data on enforced and voluntary returns between 5 July and 28 October 2024, which can be accessed here: [Returns from the UK between July and October 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/returns-from-the-uk-between-july-and-october-2024).

■ Crime: Rural Areas

Ben Maguire:

[15159]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of police officers are dedicated to rural crime teams in each police force in (a) England and (b) Wales.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not hold data on police officers working in rural crime teams.

The Home Office collects and publishes data biannually on the size and composition of the police workforce, 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>.

Information is collected on the primary function of each officer however the specific team an officer is assigned to, such as "rural crime team", is not collected.

■ Domestic Abuse: Carers and Parents

Jodie Gosling:

[15126]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Department is taking to support (a) parents and (b) carers facing domestic (i) abuse and (ii) violence from (A) children and (B) wards.

Jess Phillips:

The scale of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in our country is intolerable and this Government will treat it as the national emergency that it is. Tackling VAWG is a top priority and our mission is to halve VAWG within a decade. To achieve this ambitious aim, it is essential that we tackle domestic abuse and all forms of interpersonal abuse.

This Government's target to halve VAWG within the next decade will only succeed if we continue to ensure children and young people are also at the heart of prevention and intervention programmes and policies. Progressing work around child to parent abuse is an important part of this and we will consider the responses to the consultation on the definition of child to parent abuse as part of our approach to addressing this issue.

■ Freight: Organised Crime

Rachel Taylor:

[15356]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle serious organised freight crime.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Freight crime can have significant impacts on businesses and drivers.

We are working with the National Vehicle Crime Working Group, led by the National Police Chiefs' Council, which has established a network of vehicle crime specialists,

involving every police force in England and Wales, to help share information about emerging trends in vehicle crime and better tackle regional issues.

We are also continuing to work closely with Opal, the police's national intelligence unit focused on serious organised acquisitive crime, which has multiple thematic desks, including a vehicle crime intelligence desk which covers freight crime.

■ Lincolnshire Police: Translation Services

Richard Tice: [\[15071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much Lincolnshire Police spent on (a) translation and (b) interpretation services in each of the last three years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

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

Decisions on how to use funding and resources are an operational matter for Chief Constables. Police and Crime Commissioners are best placed to make resourcing decisions within their communities based on their local knowledge and experience.

■ Missing Persons

Rachel Gilmour: [\[15122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a cross-Departmental body with responsibility for missing person investigations, in the context of the multi-agency responsibilities for those investigations.

Jess Phillips:

The Government recognises the need for an effective multi-agency response to missing person investigations.

The Missing Persons Authorised Professional Practice (APP), issued by the College of Policing, sets out best practice guidance for all missing person investigations for police forces in England and Wales in order to prevent missing incidents as well as ensure that all safeguarding partners play a role in an investigation. This includes multi-agency enquiries. The APP for missing persons is publicly available on the College's website.

In addition to the APP, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Missing Persons has developed the '*Multi-agency response for adults missing from health and care settings*' framework, which is being rolled out, and the '*Missing Children from Care*' framework, which has been piloted in West Yorkshire. These frameworks outline good practice that can be adopted by local areas when setting up their own multi-agency protocols for the strategic and operational response to a missing incident, with an aim to ensure that the appropriate safeguarding partner responds in the best interest of the missing person.

■ National Rural Crime Network

Ben Maguire: [\[15157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the National Rural Crime Network.

Ben Maguire: [\[15158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to (a) produce and (b) implement a strategy on tackling rural crime.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Rural crime can have devastating consequences for countryside communities. We are clear that when you report a crime, it should be properly investigated with victims having faith justice will be delivered, and criminals facing meaningful consequences – no matter where you live. That is why this Government is committed to reducing crime in rural areas and a cross-Government programme of work is underway through our wider Safer Streets Mission.

Under our reforms, rural communities will be safeguarded, with tougher measures to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, strengthened neighbourhood policing and stronger measures to prevent farm theft and fly-tipping. We are also committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023.

We are continuing to work closely with the National Rural Crime Unit, a specialist police unit, and Historic England – both of which are partners of the National Rural Crime Network.

■ Non-crime Hate Incidents: Lincolnshire

Richard Tice: [\[15070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many non-crime hate incidents were recorded in Lincolnshire in each of the last three years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not currently centrally hold or collate information on the number of non-crime hate incidents recorded by individual police forces.

■ Security Industry Authority: Staff

Dame Caroline Dinéage: [\[14590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the headcount of the Security Industry Agency in each financial year between 2024-25 and 2028-29.

Jess Phillips:

The Security Industry Authority budgeted headcount for 2024/15 is 416. The Home Office is working with the SIA to establish the regulator for Martyn's Law. As part of that work the Home Office is considering resource requirements to determine what this means for SIA's headcount in future years

■ Sexual Offences: Nationality**Rupert Lowe:**[\[15139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to Answer of 19 November 2024 to Question 13879 on Sexual Offences: Languages, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of publishing registered sex offender nationality data stored on the ViSOR database.

Jess Phillips:

ViSOR is the information-sharing system that the police, probation and prison services use to manage the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders managed under multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA). The categorisation of those offenders on the system is based on the level of risk they are assessed to represent, not their nationality.

■ Sexual Offences: Victim Support Schemes**Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[15616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support victims of serious and deliberate breaches of sexual harm prevention orders.

Jess Phillips:

All individuals subject to sexual harm prevention orders (SHPOs) are managed under multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA). This is a process through which the police, probation and prison services work together and with other agencies to assess and manage the risks posed by individuals convicted of serious violent, sexual and terrorism offences living in the community to protect the public. MAPPA risk management plans must address risks to specific and potential victims. Breach of a requirement or restriction in an SHPO is a criminal offence punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.

The Ministry of Justice's Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund provides funding to over 60 specialist support services supporting victims and survivors of all ages to help them cope with their experiences and move forward with their lives.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Housing**Rupert Lowe:**[\[15076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of publishing daily numbers of irregular migrants housed in (a) hotels and (b) other accommodation.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Official statistics published by the Home Office are kept under review in line with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#), taking into account a number of factors including user needs, the resources required to compile the statistics, as well as quality and availability of data.

■ Visas: British National (Overseas)

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[14104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the number of children of British National (Overseas) (BNO) passport holders who are unable to access the BNO visa scheme because they (a) were born before 1 July 1997 and (b) do not hold a BNO passport of their own.

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[14105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take urgent steps to allow children of British National (Overseas) (BNO) visa holders who (a) were born before 1 July 1997 and (b) do not hold a BNO passport of their own to access the BNO visa scheme.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office publishes data on the BN(O) route as part of the '[Immigration System Statistics](#)' quarterly release, in the [entry clearance visas](#) and [extensions](#) detailed datasets. The Home Office does not currently hold data on the number of children of BN(O) passport holders who were born before 1 July 1997 and who do not hold a BN(O) passport.

The British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) route reflects the UK's historic commitment to those people of Hong Kong who chose to retain their ties to the UK by taking up BN(O) status and, has enabled thousands of eligible Hong Kongers and their family members to come to the UK to live, study and work in virtually any capacity, on a pathway to citizenship. We remain committed to this work while we decide on the future of departmental policies.

■ Visas: Digital Technology

Ben Maguire:

[\[15160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the technical resilience of the e-visa system; whether she has made a recent assessment of the implications for her policies of the experience of (a) identification requirements for members of the Windrush generation and (b) other recent data-related incidents.

Seema Malhotra:

eVisas have been tried and tested over several years, and millions of people in the UK already use them to prove their immigration status.

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 will highlight any potential problems to allow support teams to triage and resolve them as quickly as possible.

We are constantly working to improve the accuracy, reliability and accessibility of our digital status services, including the View and Prove service which people can use to

view their status and share it with third parties, such as an employer or a landlord. This includes proactive work to enhance the service as well as resolving issues reported to us by customers.

The View and Prove platform is rigorously tested for security and stability and proven to be reliable in terms of availability.

We understand that people may have concerns about proving their status in the absence of a physical document and are conscious in particular of the experiences of the Windrush generation. We are committed to ensuring that all people, including the most vulnerable, are properly supported to create a UKVI account, access their eVisa and share their status, in particular where they do not hold a BRP.

We will create UKVI accounts for all new applicants with no valid ID documents, and all applicants applying under the Windrush Scheme.

Legacy document holders (such as those with passports containing ink stamps or a vignette sticker confirming indefinite leave to remain) can transition to eVisas by making a free No Time Limit application. They will still retain their legacy documents and be able to prove their rights in the same way as they can now. More information on this process is available at www.gov.uk/eVisa. People who no longer have their legacy document can also make a No Time Limit application to transition to an eVisa. They will be additionally asked to enrol their biometrics as part of the application process.

Successful visa applicants receive written confirmation by email or letter that they have been granted permission, which they can keep for their personal records. Where this document cannot be used as evidence of their status, these printed documents can be used when interacting with the Home Office should any subsequent issues be encountered with their eVisa. Customers may also wish to print out their eVisa profile page if they would like a physical version for their own records.

Those who have previously been issued a BRP but no longer have it (and have no valid passport to verify their identity), can create a UKVI account by using the 'Get access to their eVisa' pages on GOV.UK. As part of the process, they will be redirected to a webform to provide their personal information and will then be invited to attend a video interview to verify their identity. Following ID verification, they can expect to receive their UKVI account log in details within 14 days (10 working days) of the video interview.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Building Safety Fund and Cladding Safety Scheme

Mr Lee Dillon:

[15089]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department plans to allow social landlords to access the (a) Building Safety Fund and (b) Cladding Safety Scheme.

Alex Norris:

Social landlords can already apply to the Cladding Safety Scheme and the Building Safety Fund (BSF) where the cost of remediating a building would threaten the financial viability of the landlord or to cover costs which - without the protections of the Building Safety Act - could have been passed on to leaseholders and shared owners.

Under the BSF, the Government has committed £239 million to date to support social landlords to remove and replace unsafe cladding on buildings over 18 metres.

The Cladding Safety Scheme for buildings between 11 and 18 metres is open to providers of social housing on the same basis as the BSF.

The budget on 30 October 2024 committed to new investment to begin to speed up remediation of social housing. We will shortly publish a strategy to accelerate remediation in all buildings, including social housing.

■ Buildings: Fire Prevention**Colum Eastwood:**[\[15534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which agencies are responsible for redress as a result of damage caused to buildings by defective building materials in Northern Ireland.

Alex Norris:

As building safety is a devolved matter, it is for the Northern Irish Government to decide appropriate methods of redress as a result of damage caused to buildings by defective building materials in Northern Ireland.

■ Business Rates**Paul Holmes:**[\[15000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate her Department made of the revenue that would be raised by the (a) small business multiplier and (b) standard multiplier in the 2024-25 financial year; and how much was raised from hereditaments with a rateable value over £500,000.

Jim McMahon:

Local authority estimates on the revenue collected on each business rates multiplier in 2024-25 are published here: [National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#). Part 2 of the local authority data tables contains the relevant breakdown.

Local authorities do not publish estimates on the revenue collected on hereditaments with a rateable value of over £500,000. The Valuation Office Agency publish data on the breakdown of rateable values here: [Non-domestic rating: stock of properties, 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

Paul Holmes: [\[15004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she next plans to reset business rate retention system.

Jim McMahon:

The government is committed to pursuing a comprehensive set of reforms to public services and the local government funding system while providing as much certainty as possible.

The budget confirmed that we will update and improve the approach to funding allocations within the Local Government Finance Settlement, with further detail set out in a policy statement in November.

Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**Paul Holmes:** [\[14996\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, If she will publish a list of (a) people and (b) organisations who made representations to her Department on the call-in of the planning application for the Chinese Embassy in London.

Matthew Pennycook:

Requests to call in these applications were made by the Foreign Secretary and by the Head of Cyber-Physical and Digital Twins, Innovate UK.

Paul Holmes: [\[14997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on what criteria she called in the planning application for the Chinese Embassy in London.

Matthew Pennycook:

The decision to call in these applications was made on the basis of the policy set out in the [Written Ministerial Statement of 26 October 2012](#). In line with the Written Ministerial Statement of [26 March 2019](#), we do not give specific reasons for calling in planning applications.

Civil Disorder: Rural Areas**Edward Morello:** [\[15041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to promote cross-departmental collaboration to strengthen rural communities following recent riots.

Alex Norris:

The Government has made £15 million available to the places most severely affected by disorder through the Community Recovery Fund to support the immediate recovery. Officials from my department have also carried out an extensive engagement process with these places to understand and address the underlying causes of the unrest.

The disorder that affected communities across the UK following the Southport tragedy this summer has made clear that a new approach to community cohesion is urgently needed. This is a priority for the Government and I have stood up a cross-government Communities & Recovery Steering Group to oversee this work.

We are listening to communities across the country to understand the challenges they face and this will inform how this Government works to empower communities and build greater cohesion.

■ **Community Housing: Older People**

Tracy Gilbert:

[15123]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help increase the availability of co-housing for older people.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government recognises that the community-led housing sector - of which cohousing is an important part - delivers a wide range of benefits, including strengthening community participation in local decision-making, engendering community cohesion, achieving high quality design and strengthening the co-operative economy. Cohousing in particular has been shown to provide an excellent solution to meeting the housing needs of some older people.

A range of funding and finance is available which can be used to support the development of community-led housing (though eligibility may depend on the nature of specific developments). This includes the Levelling-Up Home Building Fund, which provides affordable loan finance for the development of sites of 5 units or more and the Affordable Homes Programme, which provides grant funding to support the capital costs of developing affordable housing in England.

Beyond funding, our recent consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework, to which we will be responding shortly, 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.

As we develop our Long Term Housing Strategy, we will consider how the Government may further support the growth of the community-led housing sector, helping to deliver the additional homes the country needs.

■ **Council Tax**

John Glen:

[14950]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 2.81 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, what assumption her Department has made of the level of council tax receipts to be raised in England in 2025-26.

Jim McMahon:

Decisions on council tax levels are for individual local authorities. In line with OBR forecasts made under the previous government, the government will maintain a core 3% referendum principle and a 2% adult social care precept.

Paul Holmes:[\[15003\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans she has to set a council tax referendum threshold for combined authority mayoral precepts in the 2025-26 financial year.

Jim McMahon:

Details of the proposed council tax referendum principles for 2025-26 will be set out in the local government finance policy statement in late November.

Dr Simon Opher:[\[15684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of legislating to enable local authorities in England to adjust council tax rates by increasing them for higher-band properties while limiting increases for lower-band properties.

Jim McMahon:

The government does not have any plans to reform council tax. In line with OBR forecasts made under the previous government, the government will maintain a core 3% referendum principle and a 2% adult social care precept in 2025-26.

■ Council Tax: Greater London**Paul Holmes:**[\[14998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 8 November 2024 to Question 11925 on Council tax: Greater London, if she will publish a breakdown of the core spending power for 2024-25.

Jim McMahon:

A breakdown of Core Spending Power of local authorities in England for the 2024-25 financial year, including for the Greater London Authority, can be found at the following [link](#).

Paul Holmes:[\[14999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 8 November 2024 to Question 11925 on Council tax: Greater London, what estimate her Department has made of the (a) value and (b) proportionate increase of the (i) Transport for London and (ii) Greater London Authority precept in the 2025-26 financial year.

Jim McMahon:

Decisions on council tax levels and additional precepts are for relevant individual local authorities, including the Greater London Authority. There is no separate council tax precept charged by Transport for London.

■ Garden Communities: Sittingbourne

Helen Whately: [\[15021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reason she called in the Highsted Park outline planning applications.

Helen Whately: [\[15022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has had discussions with the developers of the Highsted Park outline planning applications.

Helen Whately: [\[15023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to decide on the proposed (a) M2 motorway junction and (b) Highsted Park outline planning applications.

Matthew Pennycook:

The decision to call in this application was made on the basis of the policy set out in the [Written Ministerial Statement of 26 October 2012](#). In line with the Written Ministerial Statement of [26 March 2019](#), we do not give specific reasons for calling in planning applications.

A public inquiry into the proposals will now take place, overseen by an independent Planning Inspector. Once the inquiry has concluded, the Inspector will prepare a report and recommendation for Ministers. A target date for determining the applications will be set when that report is received in MHCLG.

No discussions or meetings have taken place with the developers. Correspondence which outlined the scheme, and requested a meeting, but which did not seek call in of the applications was received. In addition, among a number of written requests to call in these applications, one was received from a project director of the developers, and one from their planning consultants.

■ General Election 2024: Proof of Identity

Stuart Anderson: [\[9623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to respond formally to the Electoral Commission's report entitled Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election.

Rushanara Ali:

Yes – the Government intends to respond to the Electoral Commission's interim report on the UK Parliamentary General Election. We understand that the Commission will publish their full report later this year, and we intend to respond to both reports together in due course.

■ Homelessness: Finance**Kim Johnson:** [\[14990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of additional funding for homelessness services.

Rushanara Ali:

I refer my hon Friend to the answer given to Question UIN [12953](#) on 18 November 2024.

■ Local Government Finance**Paul Holmes:** [\[15001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much and proportion of local government core spending power was compromised of locally-retained business rate receipts in the 2024-25 financial year; and what estimate her Department has made of the revenue from locally-retained business rate receipts in the 2025-26 financial year.

Jim McMahon:

Locally retained business rates are £13.5 billion or 21% of LGFS CSP in 24/25.

Information for 2025-26 will be included in the forthcoming Local Government Finance Settlement.

Paul Holmes: [\[15002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 4.63 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, what methodology her Department plans to use to allocate the £1.3 billion of grant funding for local government; and what steps her Department plans to take to assess the needs of rural areas.

Jim McMahon:

We will be publishing a policy statement in late November, where we will set out our intentions for the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26, including the £1.3 billion of grant funding for local government announced at the Budget, in addition to future reform of the local government finance system.

In 2025-26 we will take a deprivation-based approach with additional funding targeted to the places that need it most. Broader redistribution of funding will follow through a multi-year settlement from 2026-27.

After years of delaying much needed fair funding reform, we will update and improve the approach to funding allocations within the Local Government Finance Settlement to ensure that it reflects an up-to-date assessment of need and local resources. We want to hear from a range of voices to ensure any conclusions the review reaches are both fair and justified.

Paul Holmes:

[15007]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what datasets her Department used to calculate the Local Government Finance Settlement for financial year 2024-25.

Jim McMahon:

The Department uses a wide range of data to calculate the Local Government Finance Settlement. Each year, the government publishes an explanatory note alongside the settlement, which sets out the methodology used to calculate core spending power and what funding is included within it.

For the financial year 2024-25 the note can be found here: [Explanatory note on core spending power: final local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK.](#)

■ Local Government: Employers' Contributions

Paul Holmes:

[15006]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to provide additional funding via the Local Government Finance settlement to help local authorities with the cost of increases to employer national insurance contributions.

Jim McMahon:

We have announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding in 2025/26 for local government to deliver core services, of which £600 million is for social care.

The Government has committed to provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional employer NICs costs. This applies to those directly employed by the public sector, including local government.

We will set out further details of how this support will be delivered in due course.

■ Property Management Companies: Competition

Caroline Voaden:

[15038]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will have discussions with the Competition and Markets Authority on the potential impact of large estate management companies on (a) role of SMEs, (b) the ability of SMEs to expand in the estate management sector and (c) consumer choice for residents.

Caroline Voaden:

[15039]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of competition in the (a) leasehold and (b) freehold estate management markets; and if she will take legislative steps to help increase competition in those sectors.

Matthew Pennycook:

Managing agents are contracted by landlords to deliver services on their behalf. Details of services provided are usually set out in a management agreement between the agent and landlord.

The government's response to the Competition and Markets Authority's market study into housebuilding, which included consideration of management on private estates and homeowner choice over their estate management company, was published on 22 October. It can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

As set out in my Written Ministerial Statement to parliament of 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)), the government is clear that it is committed to bring the injustice of 'fleecehold' private estates and unfair costs to an end and we will consult next year on the best way to achieve this.

JUSTICE**■ Offenders: Electronic Tagging****Dr Kieran Mullan:**[\[14398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) arrests, (b) charges and (c) convictions have been made using data from the Acquisitive Crime GPS tagging programme in each year since its introduction.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Between 12 April 2021 and 15 November 2024, there were 213 charges and 152 convictions using the data from the Acquisitive Crime project.

The Department does not hold data on the dates of these charges and convictions or on the number of arrests, this data is held by individual police forces.

The objective of this project is not solely to catch and convict individuals for further offences, but to deter them from committing crime and reduce long term reoffending, by ensuring probation officers can continuously monitor offenders' whereabouts at all times. The first robust evaluation of the effectiveness of this project will be published next year.

■ Prisons: Repairs and Maintenance**Grahame Morris:**[\[15643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent estimate she has made of the prison maintenance backlog.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

We will shortly be publishing an ad-hoc report on the prison estate conditions survey, which will contain information on the maintenance implications.

HMPPS is investing up to £220 million on maintenance this financial year 2024/25. We will continue to invest in the HMPPS estate in 2025-26, up to £300 million on maintenance to keep prisons safe and secure.

■ **Sexual Offences: Victim Support Schemes**

Sir Ashley Fox:

[15617]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much and what proportion of victim support funding from the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner is spent on support for victims of sexual offences; and on what services this funding is spent.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The 42 Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales receive annual grant funding from the Ministry of Justice's victim and witness budget to commission local practical, emotional, and therapeutic support services for victims of all crime types.

My Department has committed £154 million per annum on a multi-year basis across this spending review period, up to the end of March 2025. For 2024/25 we provided £41 million of ringfenced funding for the recruitment of Independent Sexual and Domestic Violence Advisors, and £21 million of ringfenced funding for community-based domestic abuse and sexual violence services.

These funding commitments have enabled us to provide tailored support to enable victims of sexual violence to cope and recover from the devastating effect of their crimes. Funding amounts for individual PCC areas are not routinely published.

The PCC for Avon and Somerset publishes details on services commissioned in their annual reports available at: <https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/reports-publications/annual-reports/>.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ **Transport: Northern Ireland and Scotland**

Jamie Stone:

[901435]

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he is taking to help improve transport links between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Hilary Benn:

Connectivity is essential for economic growth which is why the Chancellor committed £5m in the Budget to explore improvements to the A75, which is the key route for road transport, using the ferry between Cairnryan and Belfast and Larne. We look forward to continuing work with the Scottish Government on this project, and welcome the recent addition of flights between Edinburgh and Liverpool and Derry City Airport.

■ United Kingdom**Lee Anderson:**[\[901439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he is taking to strengthen the Union.

Hilary Benn:

This Government is committed to the Good Friday Agreement and Northern Ireland's place in the union. We are supporting all communities working with the Executive on improving public services and encouraging investment in Northern Ireland as a great place to live, work, and do business.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ 5G: Romford****Andrew Rosindell:**[\[14930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much of Romford constituency receives 5G coverage; and when his Department expects that coverage to reach 100% of that constituency.

Chris Bryant:

Although I am aware that official reports of mobile coverage often vary substantially from people's experience on the ground, I am sure you will be delighted to know Ofcom reports that basic (non-standalone) 5G is available outside 100% of premises across your constituency from at least one mobile operator and 86% of premises from all four mobile operators. Ofcom does not measure indoor 5G coverage.

Our ambition is for all populated areas, including Romford, to have higher quality standalone 5G by 2030. We are committed to ensuring we have the right policy and regulatory framework to support investment and competition, and we are working with industry to ensure that all mobile operators meet our standalone 5G ambition.

We will consider any further steps that might be necessary to improve coverage in light of any changes to Ofcom's coverage reporting.

■ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Buildings**Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[15037\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 25 October 2024 to Question 9826 on Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Buildings, how many individual desks were occupied in her Department's HQ office in the most recent four weeks for which figures are available; and how many staff assigned to that workplace attended the HQ office in person on average in the same period.

Feryal Clark:

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 on a quarterly basis. The data is published here:

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

Digital Technology: Gloucester**Alex McIntyre:****[15161]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans he has to tackle digital exclusion in Gloucester.

Chris Bryant:

Digital inclusion is a priority for me and for Government. It means everyone should have the access, skills, support and confidence to participate in a modern digital society, whatever their circumstances. Work is ongoing to develop our approach to tackling digital exclusion and we hope to announce more on this soon. We look forward to working closely with the third sector, business and local authorities, including those in Gloucester, to ensure our plans are targeted to and based on individual needs.

Project Gigabit: Romford**Andrew Rosindell:****[14929]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much funding from Project Gigabit has been allocated to Romford constituency.

Chris Bryant:

Project Gigabit funding is not allocated at a constituency or regional level. Instead, it is targeted at premises across the UK that need it most, specifically those outside of suppliers' commercial plans.

According to the independent website Thinkbroadband.com, almost 94% of premises in the Romford constituency can access a gigabit-capable broadband connection. This is above the UK average of 85%.

We anticipate that the majority of the remaining premises in urban areas such as Romford will receive a gigabit-capable connection through the commercial market, without the need for Project Gigabit subsidy. However, funding will continue to be allocated where it is needed.

Research: Finance**Chi Onwurah:****[14937]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he plans to consult the research sector on the Government's plans for 10 year budgets for R&D activities.

Feryal Clark:

We recognise the importance of stakeholder engagement and are actively involving stakeholders from the research sector throughout the process. Further details on ten-year budgets will be set out in the Spring as part of the next phase of the Spending Review.

■ Social Media: Young People**James McMurdock:**[\[14880\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if his Department will launch an inquiry into social media harms for young people.

Feryal Clark:

The government is aware of concerns of the impact that being on smartphones and social media from a young age is having on children. This month, the government has commissioned a feasibility study into future research to understand the ongoing impact of smartphones and social media on children, to enhance the evidence base in this area.

The Online Safety Act requires online services in scope of the regime to tackle content that is harmful to children. Ofcom, the independent regulator for online safety, is due to finalise its Code of Practice for protecting children in Spring 2025 with the duties then expected to be in effect by Summer 2025.

SCOTLAND**■ Bus Services and Railways: Scotland****Imogen Walker:**[\[15715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what plans he has to work with the Scottish Government to improve (a) rail and (b) bus routes in (i) Hamilton and Clyde Valley and (ii) Scotland.

Kirsty McNeill:

Scotland Office ministers have regular meetings with the Deputy First Minister, where we discuss local economic growth as one of the key missions of this Government. Our two Governments effectively co-manage the successful Glasgow City Region Growth deal, which includes funding for infrastructure.

Both local and national rail and bus routes in Scotland are devolved, however, and therefore the responsibility of the Scottish Government.

TRANSPORT**■ Bus Services: Concessions****Mrs Elsie Blundell:**[\[15398\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of a reciprocal agreement between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to accept pensioners' bus passes.

Simon Lightwood:

Concessionary travel is a devolved policy area so the administrative arrangements in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland differ from those in England. There are no plans at present to introduce such an arrangement.

■ Bus Services: Cornwall**Ben Maguire:**[\[15156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how the funds allocated to Cornwall through the Bus Service Improvement Plan will be accessed by the local authority.

Simon Lightwood:

The £10.5 million allocated to Cornwall Council in 25/26 to support and improve bus services will be paid directly to them by the Department for Transport.

■ Bus Services: North of England**Saqib Bhatti:**[\[14984\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the £50 million in settlement funding for bus travel is in addition to funding announced as part of the Network North package.

Saqib Bhatti:[\[14985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to continue the previous Government's commitment to provide a £230 million funding package for bus services in the Midlands.

Saqib Bhatti:[\[14987\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to her oral statement on Bus Funding of 18 November 2024, Official Report, column 50, whether the £50 million funding settlement for the West Midlands is in addition to previously announced funding.

Simon Lightwood:

At the Budget on 30 October, we confirmed over £1 billion in funding in 25/26 to improve services, protect vital routes and keep fares down. On 17 November, we confirmed how we are distributing £955 million of that funding, with £712 million for local councils to deliver bus service improvement plans (BSIPs) and better meet local needs, and a further £243 million for bus operators, including funding a long-standing grant to drive down fares and drive up services. West Midlands Combined Authority will receive just under £50 million of this funding.

We are continuing the level of additional funding that was provided in the current financial year as part of Network North but have changed how this funding is allocated between councils to ensure we are treating the whole country fairly.

Prior to the Budget, there was no funding committed for bus services beyond the end of the current financial year. None of the funding we confirmed at the Budget had been given to councils or was in the Department for Transport's budget before then. Future spending decisions will be considered as part of the forthcoming Spending Review.

■ **Bus Services: Solihull**

Saqib Bhatti: [\[14986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the change in the bus fare cap on bus usage in North Solihull.

Saqib Bhatti: [\[14988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes in the level of the bus fare cap on bus usage in Meriden and Solihull East constituency.

Saqib Bhatti: [\[14989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of changes to the level of the bus fare cap on bus usage.

Simon Lightwood:

In the Budget on 30 October, the government confirmed it will invest over £150 million to introduce a new £3 cap on single bus fares in England outside London from 1 January until 31 December 2025. Under the plans of the previous administration, the current £2 cap on bus fares had been due to expire on 31 December 2024, and prior to the Budget, there was no further funding available to maintain the cap beyond this point.

The published interim evaluation of the £2 fare cap showed that patronage continued to recover following the COVID 19 pandemic and early evidence from the first two months of the scheme suggested the £2 fare cap may be playing a role in this recovery. The final evaluation of the £2 fare cap, including a further assessment of its impact on patronage will be published in due course.

Considering all its impacts, the fare cap is not financially sustainable for taxpayers and bus operators at £2. Capping fares at £3 will keep bus travel affordable while ensuring the cap is fair to taxpayers, helping millions of people access better opportunities, travel for less and protect vital bus routes, in Meriden and Solihull East, North Solihull and right across England.

■ Driving Tests

Lee Anderson: [\[15495\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions she has had with the DVSA on tackling the backlog of driving tests.

Lee Anderson: [\[15496\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions she has had with the DVSA on the adequacy of the rule that driving tests cannot be booked more than 24 weeks in advance.

Lee Anderson: [\[15497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the average waiting time is for a driving test at each driving test centre in Ashfield constituency.

Lee Anderson: [\[15498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of allowing approved driving instructors to conduct driving tests to help clear the current backlog.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) recognises there is a high demand for learners who are wanting to take their car practical driving test and is working hard to uphold road safety standards while reducing car practical driving test waiting times, as quickly as it can.

As of 18 November 2024, there were 561,451 car practical driving tests booked, and 67,190 driving tests available within the 24-week booking window.

All practical driving test appointments are shown on the DVSA live booking system, and the availability of test appointments continually changes. The agency releases test slots on a rolling 24-week basis, and adds additional appointments as soon as they become available. Candidates can check for earlier test appointments using the live [change your driving test](#) service. Other candidates cancelling or rescheduling their test also free up appointments for others to book.

There is no rule that tests can be booked up to 24 weeks in advance only. DVSA makes tests available up to 24 weeks ahead to allow those learning to drive to plan their learning to drive process and take a test when they are ready to pass.

The table below shows the average waiting time at driving test centres (DTC) that serve the Ashfield constituency.

DTC	AVERAGE CAR PRACTICAL DRIVING TEST WAITING TIME OCT 2024	BOOKED TESTS	TESTS AVAILABLE TO BOOK IN 24 WEEK BOOKING WINDOW
Ashfield	22.8	2,296	100
Chesterfield	19.8	1,647	191
Worksop	11.5	2,086	515
Nottingham (Colwick)	24	4,392	212
Nottingham (Chilwell)	23.8	3,753	59
National	19.5	561,451	67,190

The Road Traffic Act 1988 allows a full driving licence to be issued only if the person has passed the test of competence to drive. The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) 1999 regulations require driving test examiners to meet certain criteria and pass an initial qualification and examination before being authorised by the Secretary of State to conduct practical driving tests.

The regulations also specifically prohibit an examiner from simultaneously being an active approved driving instructor (ADI). Although ADIs are well qualified and proficient in driving and instruction, they are not experienced assessors. Driving examiners undertake rigorous and continuing training throughout their career. They also test many types of learners and are regularly evaluated to ensure they conduct tests in a fair and consistent manner.

There is no provision within legislation that allows an ADI to conduct a driving test for a learner driver. The Government has no plans to lay legislation to amend this.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Complaints

Rachel Taylor:

[\[15335\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will take steps to ensure that complaints about ongoing HS2 works are dealt with effectively.

Lilian Greenwood:

HS2 Ltd is committed to proactively communicating with communities impacted by the construction of the new railway, to keep them informed about disruptive works and to respond promptly and respectfully to concerns raised by members of the public.

HS2 Ltd has put in place a freephone helpdesk, which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and has a longstanding commitment to respond to all enquiries and

complaints within 20 working days and to respond to all urgent enquiries and complaints within 2 working days.

In the last financial year (2023/2024), HS2 Ltd received 17938 enquires and 576 complaints. HS2 Ltd has maintained high levels of responsiveness during this period with 100% of urgent complaints resolved within two working days, and 95% of all other complaints responded to within 20 working days or less.

■ **Manchester Airport: Parking**

Adam Jogee:

[\[15026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will have discussions with representatives from Manchester Airport on the potential impact of the level of parking charges at Manchester Airport on passengers from (a) Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency and (b) North Staffordshire.

Mike Kane:

Most airports in the UK are managed and operated as private businesses, and parking arrangements are subject to contractual agreements between airport operators and car parking companies covered by consumer laws.

Whilst the Department does engage regularly with airports on a range of operational issues, the provision and charging of car parking at airports is a matter for the airport operator as a commercial business to manage and justify.

■ **Motorways: Safety**

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[15627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to promote safe use of motorways.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government takes road safety seriously, and we are committed to reducing the numbers of those killed and injured on our roads.

The Government's THINK! Campaign addresses priority road safety issues driving the highest fatalities, including speeding, drink driving, wearing seatbelts and using mobile phones.

Turning to our motorways, safety is a key consideration for National Highways across all its activity, with a target in the second Road Investment Strategy of reducing those killed or seriously injured on the Strategic Road Network by 50% compared to the 2005-2009 baseline average. The Department for Transport and the Office of Rail and Road, in its capacity of Highways Monitor, hold National Highways to account for delivery against this performance indicator and work collectively to ensure appropriate action plans are in place to maximise safety on the network.

■ Motorways: South West**Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[15626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much money has been allocated to be spent on motorway upgrades in the South West for financial year (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26; and if she will publish a list of all scheduled motorway upgrades for this period.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department does not routinely publish a schedule of works to the level of granularity requested. However, National Highways do publish on an annual basis a breakdown of delivery and investment in its Delivery Plan Update and Annual Report and Accounts.

■ Railways: Chichester**Jess Brown-Fuller:**[\[15116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to take steps to help improve the (a) reliability and (b) frequency of rail services serving Chichester constituency.

Simon Lightwood:

There are no current plans to make changes to rail services serving Chichester constituency following on from significant changes earlier in the year.

Following a public consultation, a new West Coastway timetable was put in place from 2 June 2024. This redesigned the timetable for services in the Chichester area and doubled the number of trains towards Worthing and Brighton from two trains per hour to four trains per hour, creating a half-hourly service. This provides faster journey options towards Brighton and better spacing on the Southampton service.

Jess Brown-Fuller:[\[15117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has plans to help deliver railway infrastructure upgrades in Chichester constituency.

Simon Lightwood:

The Chancellor has been clear about the state of the nation's finances and has launched a multi-year Spending Review. The Secretary of State has announced her intention to conduct a thorough review of the previous government's transport plans to ensure that our transport infrastructure portfolio drives economic growth and delivers value for money for taxpayers.

No specific infrastructure upgrades are being actively considered in the Chichester constituency at present. Any proposals to government for such upgrades should include the support of West Sussex County Council and Transport for the South East and outline the impacts to growth, employment and housing that the proposal would involve.

■ Railways: Ticket Offices

Marsha De Cordova:

[\[14978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to ticket office opening hours at Southeastern railway stations on commuters; and what steps her Department is taking to increase accessibility to ticket offices for disabled passengers across the rail network.

Simon Lightwood:

Southeastern ticket office changes were agreed under the previous Government. The Department is now examining these plans to ensure passengers remain supported.

We recognise the vital role ticket offices play in the journeys of people with disabilities, and ensuring accessibility for all passengers is at the heart of our passenger-focused approach.

■ Roads: Staffordshire

Leigh Ingham:

[\[15150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the condition of roads in (a) Stafford and (b) the surrounding area.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously and is committed to maintaining and renewing the local highway network. Staffordshire County Council is the local highway authority for the Stafford constituency, and they are therefore responsible for the condition of their local network.

This Government has a commitment to enable local highway authorities in England to fix up to a million more potholes a year. At Budget 2024, the Chancellor announced an extra £500 million for local highway maintenance for the 2025/26 financial year, an increase of nearly 50% compared to the current financial year. The Government will confirm funding allocations to English local highway authorities, including Staffordshire County Council, in due course.

The Government publishes data annually on the condition of the local road network in England, including Staffordshire, and these are available on gov.uk.

TREASURY

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Alex Easton:

[\[15065\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to reverse the proposed tax changes to (a) agricultural property relief and (b) business property relief on family-owned (i) farms and (ii) businesses.

James Murray:

The Government set out its policy at Autumn Budget 2024 and that remains the Government's policy.

Jess Brown-Fuller:[\[15114\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of retaining existing rates of agricultural property relief.

James Murray:

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government took a number of difficult but necessary decisions on tax, welfare, and spending to restore economic stability, fix the public finances, and support public services. These were tough decisions given the situation we inherited from the previous administration, but the Government has done so in a way that makes the tax system fairer and more sustainable.

The Government set out its policy at Autumn Budget 2024 regarding agricultural property relief and business property relief. From 6 April 2026, in addition to existing nil-rate bands and exemptions, the 100% rate of relief will continue for the first £1 million of combined agricultural and business assets, and the rate of relief will be 50% thereafter.

Rupert Lowe:[\[15136\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to item 29 of Table 5.1 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, what the evidential basis is for her Department's estimate that changes to inheritance tax will raise £520 million from 2028/29.

James Murray:

I refer the Honourable Member to the PQ referenced 13620 published on 11th November 2024 at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-11-11/13620>.

Rupert Lowe:[\[15137\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many farmers her Department consulted on changes to agricultural property relief before the Autumn Budget 2024.

James Murray:

The Government takes into account all representations made ahead of the Budget, and meets with stakeholders on a regular basis.

Gareth Davies:[\[15254\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13623 on Agriculture: Inheritance Tax, what data her Department holds on the impact of reforms to (a) agricultural property relief and (b) business property relief on tenant farmers.

James Murray:

The Government has published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief. In addition to the information highlighted in the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13623 on Agriculture: Inheritance Tax, the

Chancellor of the Exchequer provided further data in her recent letter to the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee. The letter is available at committees.parliament.uk/publications/45691/documents/226235/default/.

The Government has held meetings with a range of stakeholders, including the Tenant Farmers Association.

Sir John Hayes:

[15637]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of the number of farmers who will be affected by changes to business property relief in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) South Holland and the Deepings constituency.

James Murray:

I refer the Honourable Member to the PQ referenced 12250 published on 11th November 2024 at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-11-01/12250>.

The Chancellor also recently wrote to the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee on this issue, and her letter may be of interest: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45691/documents/226235/default/>.

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Excise Duties

Rachel Gilmour:

[15128]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts of long-term alcohol consumption trends; and what assessment she has made of the potential impact of those trends on estimated future receipts from Alcohol Duty.

James Murray:

The OBR recently reviewed its forecasts of tax receipts from alcohol duty and commented on this in its Economic and Fiscal Outlook, published in October. Its updated forecast reflects lower-than-anticipated alcohol consumption in 2024-25, and a reduction in alcohol consumption growth over the medium term.

Following a request for further detail in respect of the price elasticities used in its alcohol duty costings, the OBR also published updated price elasticities for alcohol in July 2024.

The government carefully considers OBR forecasts as part of its tax policy-making process and keeps all taxes under review.

Rachel Gilmour:

[15129]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled Alcohol Duty uprating, published on 30 October 2024, if she will publish an estimate of the future administrative and operational costs to businesses associated with the withdrawal of the temporary easement on 1 February 2025.

James Murray:

At the recent Budget, the Chancellor confirmed that the current temporary wine easement will end as planned from 1 February 2025. By this time, the wine industry will have had over two years to adapt to the strength-based alcohol duty system. The summary of impacts from the alcohol duty reforms announced at Spring Budget 2023, including the wine easement, can be found here: [Alcohol Duty Reforms - GOV.UK](#)

The Budget also announced that alcohol duty will be uprated in line with RPI inflation on 1 February 2025, except on qualifying draught products. A Tax Information and Impact Note was published alongside this Budget announcement. This is available here: [Alcohol Duty uprating - GOV.UK](#)

HMRC plans to evaluate the impact of the new rates and structures three years after the changes took effect on 1 August 2023. The Government welcomes evidence from industry on the impact of the changes so far.

■ Banks and Building Societies: Closures**Rachel Taylor:****[15354]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had discussions with (a) banks and (b) building societies on steps to help keep high-street branches of banks and building societies open.

Tulip Siddiq:

Treasury Ministers regularly meet representatives from the banking and building society sectors to discuss a wide range of issues.

The Government understands the importance of face-to-face banking to communities and high streets and is committed to championing sufficient access for all as a priority. This is why the Government is working closely with banks to roll out 350 banking hubs, which will provide individuals and businesses up and down the country with critical cash and banking services. Following a meeting with the Economic Secretary in September, the UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this parliament.

The Government also recognises the value that building societies bring to their members in local communities across the country, and that they have a 28% share of the UK's branch network.

While branch closures are commercial decisions for banks and building societies, FCA guidance expects firms to carefully consider the impact of planned branch closures on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs and put in place alternatives where reasonable. This seeks to ensure that branch closures are implemented in a way that treats customers fairly. Where firms fall short of expectations, the FCA may ask for closures to be paused or other options to be put in place.

■ Business Rates

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15198\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of revenues to the Exchequer from business rates in England in each of the next five financial years.

James Murray:

The Office for Budget's Responsibility's (OBR) October 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook includes forecasts for UK business rates receipts. This is available online: https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/OBR_Economic_and_fiscal_outlook_Oct_2024.pdf.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15201\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many hereditaments in England have a rateable value over £500,000 broken down by Special Category Code.

James Murray:

The VOA publishes official statistics on Non-Domestic Rating on gov.uk.

The number of properties over £500,000 in rateable value broken down by property sector is published. This can be found in table 2.2 here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66695d2cf5e751f1b786db07/ndr_stoc_k_of_properties_2024.xlsx

The total rateable value by special category code and area of properties with a rateable value over £51,000 is published here at table 'SOP_SCAT_LA_rv_51000_plus.csv':

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6662e0a8a8f98e4a64ca94d9/ndr_stoc_k_scat_la_2024.zip

■ Business Rates and Council Tax: Valuation

John Glen: [\[14951\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024, to Question 8196 on Business Rates and Council Tax: Valuation, whether the Automated Valuation Model for Wales is adaptable to be used in England.

James Murray:

The Automated Valuation Model for Wales approach may be adaptable for use in other locations. However, as with Wales, this would require further investigation and significant preparatory work.

■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances

Paul Holmes: [\[14995\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 1.7 of her Department's publication entitled Transforming Business Rates, published on 30 October 2024, what estimate she has made of the amount of tax relief in (a) monetary terms and (b) as a reduced multiplier.

James Murray:

In 2025-26, Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) relief will provide RHL properties 40% relief up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business and the small business multiplier will be frozen at 49.9p.

This is a package worth over £1.6 billion, aimed at supporting the most vulnerable businesses. It will ensure that over 250,000 RHL properties receive the full 40% support, and in total, government support will protect over a million properties from inflationary increases.

The rates for new multipliers will be set at Budget 2025 so that the government can factor into its decision-making the next revaluation outcomes and the broader economic and fiscal context.

Paul Holmes:[\[15242\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an estimate of the additional revenue generated following the reduction of business rate relief from 75% to 40% for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in the 2025-26 financial year.

James Murray:

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) relief is a single year policy intervention. As such, the baseline scorecard assumption for 2025-26 was for RHL relief to not be extended.

At Autumn Budget, the Government announced that from 2026-27, it intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for RHL properties, including those on the high street. To support this transition, the Government has prevented RHL relief from ending in April 2025 by extending it for one year at 40 per cent up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business, and frozen the small business multiplier. This package is worth more than £1.6 billion in 2025-26.

■ Children's Play: VAT**Josh Newbury:**[\[15063\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of zero-rating Value Added Tax on admission fees for indoor play facilities.

James Murray:

VAT is a broad-based tax on consumption, and the 20 per cent standard rate applies to most goods and services. Tax breaks reduce the revenue available for vital public services and must represent value for money for the taxpayer.

One of the key considerations when assessing a new VAT relief is whether the cost saving is likely to be passed on to consumers. Evidence suggests that businesses only partially pass on any savings from lower VAT rates. The Government has no plans to zero-rate VAT on admission fees for indoor play facilities.

The Government keeps all taxes under review.

■ Council Tax: Wales

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15199\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether value significant codes are used by the Valuation Office Agency in the Automated Valuation Model for Wales.

James Murray:

Value Significant Codes (VSCs) indicate the existence of specific features that are likely to affect the value of a property either positively or negatively.

The Automated Valuation Model utilises some VSCs, as published in [PQ UIN 19500](#).

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15200\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2024 to Question 7829 on Council Tax: Wales, what information the Valuation Office Agency plans to publish before April 2025.

James Murray:

As outlined in the response to [PQ UIN 7829](#), the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) will publish further information on the model and its use in supporting the Welsh Government's Council Tax reform ambitions on its website before April 2025. In addition, the VOA will publish any related third-party reports on its website by April 2025.

■ Cryptocurrencies

Mohammad Yasin: [\[15527\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of developing an investment programme in cryptocurrency.

Tulip Siddiq:

The UK's foreign currency assets are held in the Exchange Equalisation Account. These assets are managed in line with the following investment principles:

- Ensuring readiness to meet the policy requirements of the reserves
- Limiting risk and volatility to avoid compromising the policy readiness of the reserves
- Maximising returns within these constraints

More detail on how the official reserves are managed can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/management-of-the-official-reserves--2>

Given this, HM Treasury has no plans to adopt an investment programme in crypto assets.

■ Defibrillators: VAT**Harriet Cross:**[\[15706\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of removing VAT from defibrillator sales on (a) public access to defibrillators and (b) survival rates for cardiac arrest patients in areas where fewer than half of postcodes have access to a defibrillator within the recommended response time.

James Murray:

The Government currently provides VAT reliefs to aid the purchase of defibrillators. For example, when an AED is purchased with funds provided by a charity and then donated to an eligible body no VAT is charged. Furthermore, all state schools in England have been fitted with AEDs.

The Government keeps all taxes under review including consideration of impacts. A key consideration for any potential VAT relief is whether savings would be passed on to the consumer, and evidence suggests that savings are not always passed on.

VAT is, in addition, the UK's second largest tax forecast to raise £171 billion in 2024/25, and taxation is a vital source of revenue which helps to fund public services, including the NHS. While we keep all taxes under review, the Government has therefore no current plans to make changes to the VAT treatment of AEDs.

■ Departmental Coordination**John Glen:**[\[14952\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she attends meetings of the Mission Boards.

Darren Jones:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is the Chair of the Growth Mission Board and attends other mission boards as and when appropriate. Beyond this, it is a long-established precedent that information about the discussions that have taken place in Cabinet and its committees - including mission boards - including their attendance, and how often they have met, is not normally shared publicly.

■ Development Aid**Claire Hanna:**[\[15483\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what progress she is making on returning the level of the aid budget to 0.7% of gross national income.

Darren Jones:

The Government remains committed to restoring Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending to 0.7% of GNI as soon as fiscal circumstances allow, but this isn't currently affordable. The OBR's latest forecast shows that the ODA fiscal tests are not due to be met within the Parliament. The Government will continue to monitor future forecasts closely, and each year will review and confirm, in accordance with the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015,

whether a return to spending 0.7% GNI on ODA is possible against the latest fiscal forecast.

■ **Employers' Contributions: Public Houses**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[15197\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to the level of employer's National Insurance contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024 on the average cost of a pint of beer in a pub.

James Murray:

A Tax Information and Impact Note on the changes to employer NICs was published on 13 November alongside the legislation when it was introduced to Parliament.

The latest forecasts for tax revenues were published alongside the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) October 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook. These forecasts are based on economic determinants, including wage growth and employment levels.

Pubs and breweries make an enormous contribution to our economy and society, and this is recognised in the tax system.

At the Budget, the Chancellor cut alcohol duty on qualifying draught products – approximately 60% of the alcoholic drinks sold in pubs. This represents an overall reduction in duty bills of over £85m a year and is equivalent to a 1p duty reduction on a typical pint. This reduction increased the relief available on draught products to 13.9%.

■ **Financial Services: UK Trade with EU**

Mark Garnier:

[\[15185\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps the Government is taking to increase access to EU markets for UK collective Investment in transferable securities schemes; and what steps her Department is taking to help promote UK funds given their classification as alternative investment funds under EU rules.

Tulip Siddiq:

The UK has granted market access to certain retail funds from the European Economic Area under the Overseas Funds Regime. Decisions regarding market access for UK firms or products into the European Union are an autonomous decision for the European Union. The government has committed to reset the UK's relationship with the European Union through strengthening ties, securing a broad-based security pact, and improving conditions for trade and investment. This recognises the inter-connectedness of our markets and ensures that our approach to financial services supports growth and delivers investment.

Ministers and officials at HM Treasury continue to engage regularly with the European Union and Governments in other jurisdictions, including through Economic and Financial Dialogues, to address barriers to UK financial services products being marketed abroad, and to promote the UK's world-leading financial services sector.

■ Government Departments: Communication and Consultants

John Glen:

[14946]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 22 October 2024 to Question 8813 on Government Departments: Communications and Consultants, what the baseline figures on expenditure on (a) communications and (b) consultants are in each Department in 2024-25 or the closest year for which data is available.

Darren Jones:

Cabinet Office provided estimates of communications spending during the Public Spending Audit in July 2024. Estimates were based on internal Government Communication Service data on campaigns planned by Departments and arm's length bodies at the time of commissioning.

These indicate that the UK Government was expected to spend £449m on communications campaigns during 2024-25. At Autumn Budget 2024, the Chancellor announced that the Government Communications Service is expecting to save £85 million from reducing unnecessary communications spend – exceeding the £50 million target set out in her July 2024 Inheritance speech.

Communications and marketing spend above £100,000 is subject to central spending control and, as such, is published by each government department alongside other spend control data on a quarterly basis on gov.uk. This can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/search/all?keywords=spend+control+data&order=relevance>.

In July 2024, the government committed to stop non-essential government consultancy spend in 2024-25 and halve government spending on consultancy in future years. This will save £550 million in 2024-25 and £680 million in 2025-26. To help departments do this and make value for money decisions about how to resource work the civil service headcount cap announced by the previous administration will be lifted. Individual departments publish different categories of spending on external resource including consultancy in their Annual Reports and Accounts. These can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-reports-and-accounts-for-central-government-departments>

■ Help to Buy Scheme: Individual Savings Accounts

Claire Hanna:

[15503]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to revise the upper purchase price on help to buy ISAs in line with the housing market.

Tulip Siddiq:

This Government is committed to helping first time buyers own their own home, and will do this by building 1.5 million more homes.

The Government keeps savings policy under review, any changes of this kind would be made at a relevant fiscal event.

■ Office for Value for Money

John Glen:

[\[14945\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 22 October 2024 to Question 8950 on Office for Value for Money, whether the Chair is a regulated public appointment; and whether he was selected via open and fair competition.

Darren Jones:

The appointment of the independent Chair of the Office for Value for Money is a Direct Ministerial Appointment, which is not a regulated appointment.

■ Property: Valuation

John Glen:

[\[14949\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what type of regression model is used in the Automated Valuation Model of the Valuation Office Agency.

James Murray:

The Automated Valuation Model uses multiple regression with an advanced spatial modelling technique called Gaussian Markov Random Fields to better reflect the impact of location.

■ Public Expenditure

Ben Lake:

[\[15661\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to review the (a) operation and (b) adequacy of the Barnett Formula.

Darren Jones:

There are currently no plans to modify the operation of the Barnett formula. The Barnett formula has stood the test of time because it is simple, efficient and provides a clear and certain outcome.

The Welsh Government currently receives at least 20% more funding per person than equivalent UK Government spending in the rest of the UK. That translates into over £4 billion more in 2025-26.

■ Retail Trade: Business Rates

Jess Brown-Fuller:

[\[15118\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to (a) retail, (b) hospitality and (c) leisure business rates on high street businesses.

James Murray:

Without any government intervention, the current Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) relief would have ended entirely in April 2025, creating a cliff-edge for businesses. Instead, the Government has decided to offer a 40 per cent discount to RHL properties up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business in 2025-26 and frozen

the small business multiplier. This is a package worth over £1.6 billion in 2025-26, aimed at supporting the most vulnerable businesses, ensuring that over 250,000 RHL properties receive the full 40% support.

By tapering RHL relief to 40%, rather than removing it entirely, the government has saved the average pub, with a rateable value (RV) of £16,800, over £3,300 in 2025.

At Budget, the Government also announced that from 2026-27, it intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for RHL properties, including those on the high street. This permanent tax cut will ensure that they benefit from much-needed certainty and support. The Government intends to fund this by introducing a higher multiplier on the most valuable properties, which includes the majority of large distribution warehouses, including warehouses used by online giants.

The exact rates for any new business rate multipliers will not be set until Budget 2025 so that the Government can take into account the revaluation outcomes as well as the economic and fiscal context.

■ Taxation: Domicil

John Glen: [\[14948\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the revenue generated by proposed changes to the non-domiciled tax regime in the next five financial years.

James Murray:

The further reforms to the non-domiciled tax regime announced at Autumn Budget are estimated to raise £12.7bn over the next five financial years.

We published costings for these further reforms on 30th October.

Page 32 of the [Autumn Budget Policy Costings Publication](#)

■ Taxation: International Cooperation

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[15401\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make it her policy to support the UN Tax Convention.

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[15402\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if the Government will propose that the principles of (a) human rights, (b) workers' rights and (c) climate justice are contained within the UN Tax Convention.

James Murray:

The UK is committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure inclusive and effective international tax cooperation, and has been actively engaging in negotiations at the UN over a future Framework Convention.

The UK believes that a UN Tax Framework Convention has the potential to further advance international tax cooperation, but to be successful, it needs to be clear in its

aims, avoid duplicating initiatives, and seek to secure the broad support and participation of members.

The UK was disappointed that these principles were not fully reflected in the Terms of Reference agreed by the UN Ad Hoc Committee in August, but will continue to engage constructively in support of key principles for strengthening international tax cooperation.

■ Treasury: Public Appointments and Special Advisers

John Glen:

[\[14947\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she plans to publish the declaration of interests of (a) public appointments, (b) special advisers and (c) direct ministerial appointments.

Darren Jones:

HM Treasury follows relevant central guidance on handling declarations of interest for special advisers, public appointments and direct ministerial appointments. Any relevant interests of special advisers are published in the Treasury's Annual Report and Accounts.

■ VAT: Fraud

Sir Iain Duncan Smith:

[\[14902\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to tackle VAT fraud; and if she will bring forward legislative proposals to extend Deemed Reseller rules to UK-established businesses.

James Murray:

Tax fraud undermines our economy, hurts legitimate businesses and robs our vital public services of much-needed funds.

The government is clear in its commitment to closing the tax gap, and ensuring everyone pays the tax that is legally due.

HMRC uses a wide range of civil and criminal powers to tackle VAT fraud. Online Marketplace liability rules were introduced in 2021 specifically to tackle VAT fraud and non-compliance by overseas sellers. The OBR estimates this will raise £1.8 billion per annum by 2026/27. The government continues to keep this tax policy under review.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Staff

Rupert Lowe:

[\[15044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff of what grade her Department employed in non-customer engaging roles in each of the last five financial years.

Andrew Western:

The information you have requested is not held centrally and will have to be provided by operational teams. Gathering this data would incur disproportionate costs.

Rupert Lowe:[\[15045\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many staff her Department employs at (a) SEO, (b) Grade 7 and (c) Grade 6.

Andrew Western:

We have provided the information requested in the table below. Staffing figures (as of 31st October 2024) are provided as Full Time Equivalence (FTE):

GRADE	FTE
SEO	4099.3
G7	3069.8
G6	1146.0

■ Homelessness: Temporary Accommodation

Peter Lamb:[\[15404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of levels of Housing Benefit subsidy on the capacity of local authorities to meet their statutory homelessness duties.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We recognise the financial pressures which local authorities are experiencing. MHCLG are increasing funding for homelessness services from next year by £233 million compared to this year (2024/25). Levels of Housing Benefit subsidy for temporary accommodation are kept under review and future decisions will be taken in the context of the government's missions, goals on housing and the current fiscal context.

■ Local Government: St Neots

Ian Sollom:[\[15869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of having officials from her Department work at the St Neots Citizen Hub (a) on a permanent basis and (b) one day a week, in the context of helping to improve her Department's services in the local area.

Andrew Western:

Our Service Leader for East Anglia is very happy to explore the potential to deliver job club/job search sessions at St Neots Citizen Hub. Our Partnership Manager for Cambridge, Huntingdon, Ely and Haverhill has already established a relationship with the Citizens Hub in St Neots having attended an event on 21st November. There is an

additional meeting planned in December to investigate how the Jobcentre and Citizens Hub can work closely together, including having Jobcentre colleagues within the Hub.

■ Multiple Births

Abtisam Mohamed:

[15567]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what financial support is available from her Department for women who have given birth to (a) twins and (b) other multiples.

Andrew Western:

There are two types of maternity pay available to pregnant working women which offer a measure of financial security to help them take time off work in the later stages of their pregnancy and in the months following childbirth:

- Statutory Maternity Pay paid by employers
- Maternity Allowance paid by the Department for Work and Pensions to eligible women (including the self-employed and women in employment who are not eligible for SMP).

The DWP wants new mothers to be able to take time away from work in the interests of their own and their baby's health and wellbeing. For this reason, maternity pay is primarily a health and safety provision for pregnant working women. It is not, and has never been, intended to replace a woman's earnings completely nor is it intended to help with the cost of having a baby; rather, it provides a measure of financial security to help pregnant working women to take time off work in the later stages of their pregnancy and in the months following childbirth. As such, maternity pay is paid for each pregnancy, not in respect of each child.

Additional financial support is available depending on individual circumstances, such as Universal Credit and Child Benefit. The Sure Start Maternity Grant (a lump sum payment of £500) may also be available. For more information about benefits and financial support available to pregnant women and their families can be found on www.gov.uk via the Childcare and Parenting link on the home page.

■ Personal Independence Payment

Mary Glindon:

[15184]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 14 November 2024 to Question 12735 on Personal Independence Payments, if he will take steps to reduce the median wait for award review decisions.

Sir Stephen Timms:

We are aware that many claimants are waiting a long time for their award review.

Due to competing priorities and limited resources, we are currently prioritising getting new claims into payment as quickly as possible to ensure financial support is provided for those who need it.

Most award review decisions are now made without the need for an assessment by a Healthcare Professional, where we have sufficient information, which helps to reduce the time taken to process many cases.

For those waiting for a review, we keep them informed and continue to extend awards where necessary, to ensure claims remain in payment. This also ensures continuity of entitlement to Motability vehicles and blue badges for those who need it.

■ Social Security Benefits: EU Nationals

Rupert Lowe:

[\[15046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people from the EU without settled status have been paid benefits since the end of the transition period.

Andrew Western:

The requested information is not readily available. We are, however, exploring the feasibility of developing suitable statistics related to the immigration status of non-UK / Irish Universal Credit claimants.

EU citizens present in the UK at the end of the Transition Period but with less than 5 year's continuous residence have been able to apply for pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme. They can access disability benefits and, if they are exercising a qualifying right to reside, for example as a worker or self-employed, they can access income related benefits.

EU citizens who have arrived in the UK since the end of the Transition Period will be subject to the same rules as citizens from the rest of the world. They typically have no recourse to public funds for the first five years and cannot access income related, disability or carer benefits.

Those who have made sufficient national insurance contributions can access contributory benefits.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[15047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much her Department has paid in benefits to people from the EU without settled status since the end of the transition period.

Andrew Western:

The requested information is not readily available. We are, however, exploring the feasibility of developing suitable statistics related to the immigration status of non-UK / Irish Universal Credit claimants.

EU citizens present in the UK at the end of the Transition Period but with less than 5 year's continuous residence have been able to apply for pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme. They can access disability benefits and, if they are exercising a qualifying right to reside, for example as a worker or self-employed, they can access income related benefits.

EU citizens who have arrived in the UK since the end of the Transition Period will be subject to the same rules as citizens from the rest of the world. They typically have no recourse to public funds for the first five years and cannot access income related, disability or carer benefits.

Those who have made sufficient national insurance contributions can access contributory benefits.

■ Social Security Benefits: Foreign Nationals

Rupert Lowe:

[16094]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing benefits from foreign national offenders.

Andrew Western:

In order to receive taxpayer-funded benefits such as Universal Credit or Personal Independence Payments, an individual must either be a British or Irish citizen or hold a valid UK immigration status that allows them to access such benefits. If DWP is made aware of a change in a customer's circumstances, either by the customer directly or by another government department (such as the Home Office), then the relevant claim will be reviewed. This includes if immigration status is cancelled due to criminality, or if a customer is sent to prison/young offenders' institution or is in custody awaiting trial (on remand).

If a customer is sent to prison, all benefit payments except the following will stop: housing payments part of Universal Credit (in some cases), tax credits and Child Benefit (in some cases), Housing Benefit (for shorter sentences), and council tax assistance (if eligible). Additional information on benefit eligibility whilst in prison or remand is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-and-prison/benefits-that-stop-or-are-suspended>.

If immigration status ends, they will lose entitlement to benefits.

■ Social Security Benefits: Overpayments

Rupert Lowe:

[15043]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what overpayments of benefits due to Departmental error there were in each of the last five financial years.

Andrew Western:

The Department publishes estimates of the levels of fraud and error in the benefit system by financial year. These statistics for the last five years are available at: [Fraud and error in the benefit system - GOV.UK](#)

Below is an extract:

OVERALL LEVELS OF MVFE

	FYE 24	FYE 23	FYE 22	FYE21	FYE 20
All	3.7% (£9.7bn)	3.6% (£8.3bn)	4.0% (£8.7bn)	3.9% (£8.2bn)	2.4% (£4.5bn)
Fraud	2.8% (£7.4bn)	2.7% (£6.3bn)	3.0% (£6.5bn)	2.9% (£6.2bn)	1.4% (£2.7bn)
Claimant Error	0.6% (£1.6bn)	0.6% (£1.4bn)	0.7% (£1.5bn)	0.6% (£1.3bn)	0.6% (£1.1bn)
Official Error	0.3% (£0.8bn)	0.3% (£0.7bn)	0.3% (£0.7bn)	0.4% (£0.8bn)	0.4% (£0.7bn)

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

DEFENCE

■ Military Aircraft: Helicopters

Helen Morgan:

[\[14375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of exposure to (a) Sea King (b) Westland Wessex (c) Puma and (d) CH-47 Chinook helicopter (i) fuel and (ii) exhaust fumes on aircrew's (A) health and (B) risk of developing cancer.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 26 November 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Al Carns:

Common law claims alleging adverse impact from helicopter fuel and exhaust fumes were first received in 2019.

Without any admission of liability, since 23 April 2023 the Ministry of Defence has made five compensation payments, totalling £3,578,566 in relation to common law claims alleging adverse impact from helicopter fuel and exhaust fumes. As of the 14 November 2024 there are ~~six~~ **seven** related, continuing common law compensation claims.

The department is in the process of testing the exhaust emissions of in-service helicopters, including Chinook and Puma to ensure we are meeting our duty of care for personnel. It is essential that we can assure our people of their safety at work.

The Westland Sea king was retired in 2018. The Westland Wessex was retired in 2003.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum: Health Services

Nick Timothy:

[\[14805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what contracts have been agreed with private companies to provide healthcare for asylum seekers and refugees since 5 July 2024.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 26 November 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Dame Angela Eagle:

~~The Home Office has agreed to no such contracts.~~

None.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Statutory gambling levy and stake limit for online slots**

Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth (Stephanie Peacock):

[[HCWS253](#)]

I am repeating the following Written Ministerial Statement made today in the other place by my Noble Friend, the Minister for Gambling and DCMS Lords Minister, Baroness Twycross:

I wish to inform the House that His Majesty's Government has today published its response to the public consultation entitled 'Consultation on the structure, distribution and governance of the statutory levy on gambling operators'.

The current funding system for research, prevention and treatment of gambling-related harms reliant on voluntary donations from industry is no longer fit for purpose. While the industry's significant uplift in the level of donations in recent years is welcome, we recognise that the quantum of funding is not the only requirement for an effective and equitable system.

That is why we are taking the decision to introduce a statutory levy as a priority, in line with our manifesto commitment to reduce gambling harms. The levy will be paid by operators and collected and administered by the Gambling Commission under the strategic direction of the Government. Today's publication represents a significant change to funding and commissioning arrangements. It will deliver increased and trusted investment directed where it is needed most. This will further strengthen the evidence base to inform policy, and build an effective prevention and treatment system across the country. We want the public to be better aware of the risks of gambling, and for anyone suffering from gambling harms to access timely and effective support when and where they need it.

The Government will implement the statutory levy as follows:

The structure of the levy

The levy will be charged at a set rate for all holders of a Gambling Commission operating licence, depending on the sector. In recognition of the higher rates of problem gambling associated with products online compared to most land-based products, as well as the higher operating costs in the land-based sector, the levy will see online operators pay more towards research, prevention and treatment. The levy will be introduced via secondary legislation and ensure critical funding is flowing to priority projects and services in the next financial year.

We have had clear commitments from industry that operators will maintain their voluntary financial contributions to research, prevention and treatment under the current regime, especially to support the National Gambling Support Network, until the levy is in force.

This consultation response should provide sufficient notice to licensees of our approach and ultimately delivers simplicity for all parts of the new system.

The distribution of the levy

The levy will be collected by the Gambling Commission, as above. To maximise the input of world-leading expertise and authority across our public bodies in the future system, the Gambling Commission will allocate funding to a commissioning lead for each of the research, prevention and treatment pillars:

- Research will be allocated 20% of levy funding, and will be overseen by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to deliver a bespoke Research Programme on Gambling, and to the Gambling Commission to direct further research in line with the licensing objectives;
- Prevention will be allocated 30% of levy funding to develop a comprehensive approach to prevention and early intervention with the lead organisation as yet to be decided. However, further consideration of the evidence is needed in order to appoint a lead commissioning body in this crucial and novel area for the Government's approach to tackling gambling-related harm.
- Treatment will be allocated 50% of levy funding and be overseen by NHS England, and appropriate bodies in Scotland and Wales, to commission the full treatment pathway, from referral and triage through to aftercare.

I recognise that many of those interested in this area have been expecting the Government's final decisions on all aspects of the design of the future levy system, especially regarding prevention on which we consulted broadly. Ultimately, prevention is a crucial part of the Government's efforts to further reduce gambling-related harm and it is important we take the time to get this right.

However, the statutory instrument introducing the levy is silent on the distribution of levy funding, and our overriding priority is to meet our commitment to having the levy in place by the summer. That is why we are seeking to publish this initial response and progress the legislative process. We will continue to work at pace to finalise our decisions on prevention soon. Our aim is to publish a further response document in the coming months and I will update the House in due course.

The governance of the levy

A Gambling Levy Programme Board will be established to be the central oversight mechanism for the Government. This will bring together key Government departments, including DCMS, HM Treasury, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. It will also include representatives from the Scottish and Welsh Governments to ensure the levy is making an impact on the ground.

Alongside the Board, a Gambling Levy Advisory Group will be established to provide expert advice on funding priorities and emerging issues in support of commissioning bodies' efforts to deliver on the Government's objectives. We will conduct a formal review

of the levy system within 5 years, where the structure and health of the levy system will be assessed and adjustments can be made to ensure we are achieving our aims.

Policy Impact

While we expect the statutory levy will have some financial impact on gambling operators, we think these are necessary and proportionate. The levy will increase the independence of spending and Government oversight regarding commissioning decisions. It will play an important part in the Government's wider aim to have a better informed and protected public when it comes to gambling-related harms. This investment will also ensure the Government and the Gambling Commission have the robust evidence needed to strike the right balance between freedom and protection as new challenges arise.

The publication today is further evidence of the Government's continued commitment to tackling gambling-related harm. We want to ensure that people across our country can access trusted and quality information, support and treatment when it comes to gambling-related harms. We believe that the introduction of the statutory levy is a crucial step in meeting these aims.

I will place a copy of the response to the consultation in the libraries of both Houses.

Stake limits for online slots

Online slots are a higher-risk gambling product, associated with large losses, long sessions, and binge play. However, unlike land-based gaming machines which offer broadly similar games, they have no statutory stake limits. The Gambling Act Review white paper, published on 27 April 2023 under the previous Government, committed to addressing the risk posed to players by these theoretically limitless online slots stakes. I wish to inform the House that His Majesty's Government intends to proceed with the introduction of stake limits for online slots through a statutory instrument.

A consultation was run from 26 July to 4 October 2023 that invited views on a stake limit for online slots games of £2, £5, £10 or £15 per spin. It also outlined options for additional protections for those aged 18 to 24 through a £2 limit, a £4 limit, or specific protections on a case-by-case basis. Ministers have considered the consultation and available evidence and the Government has decided to introduce stake limits of £5 per spin for adults aged 25 and over. We will also introduce a statutory maximum limit of £2 per spin for young adults aged 18-24 years old, whom the evidence suggests can be particularly vulnerable to harms associated with high stakes play.

These stake limits will be subject to an implementation period. This means that, following debates in Parliament, operators will have 6 weeks from the day the statutory instrument is made by the Minister to implement the £5 limit and a further 6 weeks to implement the £2 limit.

The introduction of these stake limits is proportionate and is a key step in achieving the Government's objective of reducing gambling-related harms. Importantly, these changes bring online slot games in line with existing restrictions on slot machines in casinos. These limits are also aligned with the recommendation made by the Culture, Media and

Sport Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2023-24, 'Gambling regulation', published in December 2023.

EDUCATION

■ Breakfast Club Early Adopters

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Minister for Early Education (Stephen Morgan): [\[HCWS256\]](#)

This government believes that every child deserves access to a brilliant education, including the opportunity to have a supportive start to the school day. That is why the government made a manifesto commitment to introduce free breakfast clubs for primary school children, breaking down barriers to opportunity and setting every child up to achieve.

As a first step towards this commitment from today 27th November 2024, schools can apply to become one of up to 750 early adopter schools, providing free breakfast clubs from April 2025, as part of a test-and-learn phase. These schools will be funded to provide access to a free, universal breakfast club lasting at least 30 minutes that includes food. New breakfast clubs, once rolled out nationally, will be available to every state-funded school with primary aged children.

Breakfast clubs help make sure children are ready to start the school day. They support children's attendance and attainment. Breakfast clubs offer much more than just food; they can serve as a welcoming space for children, providing valuable opportunities for them to play, learn, and socialise at the beginning of the school day. Breakfast clubs also give families more choices in childcare and support with the cost of living. We want every school, every child, and every family to benefit, which is why the Chancellor tripled the investment in breakfast clubs in the Autumn 2024 budget to over £30 million in the 2025-26 financial year.

Full details on the early adopter scheme, including how schools can apply to take part, will be available on gov.uk

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Epigenetics

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention (Andrew Gwynne): [\[HCWS257\]](#)

My noble friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health (Baroness Merron) has made the following Written Statement:

Today I am announcing the launch of a new research collaboration between the Government, UK Biobank and Oxford Nanopore Technologies. The new generation of nanopore-based molecular sensing technology created by this leading UK headquartered, life science company will be used to conduct detailed genetic sequencing

of 50,000 samples in the UK Biobank, the UK's primary biomedical database. This represents a significant expansion of Oxford Nanopore's collaboration with UK Biobank which started with a 5,000-genome pilot.

This new collaboration will create the world's first comprehensive dataset of epigenetic modifications in the human genome and demonstrate the UK's continued leadership in the field of genetics. Further exploration of epigenetics – the emerging study of how DNA and its expression is affected by modifications that do not change the underlying DNA sequence – could unlock a deeper understanding of the causes of diseases such as cancer and neurological conditions. This could pave the way for new diagnostic and targeted treatments, improving patient care and giving hope to the millions of people who live with conditions like these.

This expansion of the Epigenetics Programme is an early example of collaboration between Oxford Nanopore and HMG, building on the plans to form a strategic partnership [announced](#) on 5 November. I will provide further updates to the house on this collaboration as it develops.

HOME OFFICE

■ Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Order launch

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls (Jess Phillips): [\[HCWS254\]](#)

My hon Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Victims and Violence Against Women and Girls (Alex Davies-Jones) and I, are today pleased to announce the launch of a pilot for the new Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPN) and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs). DAPNs and DAPOs will be launching in Greater Manchester Police, three London boroughs with the Metropolitan Police Service - Croydon, Bromley and Sutton - and the British Transport Police. A further two sites, North Wales Police and Cleveland Police, will be onboarded in early 2025.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 legislated for the new DAPN and DAPO with the aim to bring together the strongest elements of the existing protective order regime into a single, comprehensive, flexible order.

The rollout of these new protections is a key part of the Government's Safer Streets mission and the unprecedented aim to halve violence against women and girls (VAWG) in a decade. Domestic abuse is the most prevalent form of VAWG, with 2.2 million people estimated to have experienced domestic abuse in the year ending June 2024 [1]. Taking action to tackle domestic abuse and improve the justice system response to this abhorrent abuse is therefore central to achieving this Government's ambition. The previous government failed to roll out these new protections.

The new DAPN and DAPO will provide protection from all forms of domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour and will give the police and courts powers to impose tougher restrictions on perpetrators of domestic abuse, including mandatory notification requirements, attendance to a behaviour change programme and electronic

monitoring. Breach of any requirement imposed by the DAPO will be a criminal offence punishable by up to 5 years' imprisonment, a fine, or both. The DAPO will also be the first cross-jurisdictional order available in the family, civil and criminal courts meaning police, victims and third parties can apply.

In accordance with Section 50 of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021), I am publishing a police statutory guidance on DAPNs and DAPOs and the consultation response. A public consultation was undertaken for eight weeks in February 2024 on the draft statutory guidance and this updated statutory guidance reflects the feedback from this consultation. The guidance aims to provide police forces with information to support the effective use of DAPNs and DAPOs. These will be published on GOV.UK today.

We would like to thank all the partners who have worked so hard to reach this point. This is an important step in strengthening the police and criminal justice response to domestic abuse and keeping victims safe.

[1] Crime Survey for England and Wales, respondents aged over 16 in England and Wales

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Veterans' Access to Social Housing

Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): [\[HCWS255\]](#)

As we set out in our manifesto and the Prime Minister reiterated in his conference speech on 24 September, this Government is committed to supporting our armed forces communities and ensuring veterans have access to the housing support they need.

To honour that commitment and facilitate access to social housing for veterans, I am today laying regulations to exempt all former members of the regular armed forces from any local connection tests for social housing applied by local councils in England.

Having a connection to an area should not be a barrier to housing for those who put their lives on the line for our country.

The regulations laid today will ensure that no veteran of the regular armed forces will need to meet a local connection test for social housing regardless of when they last served.

The Deputy Prime Minister has already written to local councils to remind them of the guidance and flexibilities to facilitate access of veterans to social housing.

Statutory guidance will be updated to reflect these changes. This includes specific guidance on improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces with examples of ways in which councils can ensure that Service Personnel and their families are given appropriate priority for social housing. We know that councils use the flexibilities available to them, but we must ensure that no veteran is unfairly penalised.

In addition to these measures, the government has committed a further £3.5 million to the Reducing Veteran Homelessness Programme. This includes Op FORTITUDE, the single referral pathway for veterans at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

We will continue to work with the sector to deliver affordable homes to meet the needs of veterans as part of our broader commitment to deliver the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation, and in the development of our long-term housing strategy.

Veterans represent the very best of our country. The Government is committed to honouring their sacrifices and ensuring homes will be there for heroes across the UK.