

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 28 November 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:45 P.M., 28 November 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Department for Business and Trade: Bereavement Leave

Andrew Griffith:

[\[15887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether staff in his Department are entitled to bereavement leave.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade allows employees to take up to five days Special Leave with pay in the event of a death of a dependant, close relative or other person in a close relationship.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Living Wage

Alison Griffiths:

[\[16064\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many employees in his Department are paid the National Living Wage.

Alison Griffiths:

[\[16065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many employees in his Department are paid the National Minimum Wage.

Justin Madders:

There are currently no employees in DBT who are paid at the level of the National Living Wage or the National Minimum Wage.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Parental Leave

Andrew Griffith:

[\[15885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department offers its staff shared parental leave from their first working day.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade offers Shared Parental Leave to all eligible employees in line with the statutory approach.

As part of our Make Work Pay commitment, we will be carrying out a review of the wider statutory parental leave landscape, including Shared Parental Leave, ensuring that the parental leave system offers the best possible support to working families. The Employment Rights Bill means stronger, more family-friendly employment rights for workers and will ensure a fairer and more equal labour market.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Paternity Leave**Andrew Griffith:** [\[15884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department offers paternity leave to its staff from their first working day.

Justin Madders:

The Department offers Paternity Leave in line with the statutory approach and will be reviewing its policy following the changes brought in by the Employment Rights Bill. Paternity Leave is set to become a day one right, removing the current continuity of service requirements and bringing 32,000 fathers and partners into scope. The Employment Rights Bill means stronger, more family-friendly employment rights for workers and will ensure a fairer and more equal labour market.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Unfair Dismissal**Andrew Griffith:** [\[15886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether staff in his Department receive protections from unfair dismissal from their first working day.

Justin Madders:

Around 9 million employees have been working for their employer for less than two years, so have only very limited statutory protection against unfair dismissal. Our Employment Rights Bill will provide a new baseline of security for employees, including day one protection from unfair dismissal.

Department for Business and Trade (DBT) employees working in England, Scotland and Wales are subject to a two year qualifying period before they receive legal protection from unfair dismissal. Employment Law is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland and DBT employees working there are subject to a one year qualifying period.

■ Living Wage**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[15743\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what estimate has been made of the average annual salary of people in receipt of the National Living Wage in April 2024.

Justin Madders:

The current National Living Wage (NLW) is set at £11.44 per hour. This means for a full-time worker on the NLW working 35 hours each week, their gross annual earnings are £20,821. This will increase to £22,222 after the new NLW rate of £12.21 is applied from 1st April 2025.

Each worker's take home salary will vary as this will depend on a range of factors, including total hours worked, taxes and other lawful deductions, and additional benefits.

CABINET OFFICE**■ Arms Length Bodies: Equality****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[15239\]](#)

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 the exemptions process applies to arm's length bodies.

Georgia Gould:

Yes. As paragraph 4 of the Civil Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Expenditure Guidance makes clear, the same exemptions process applies to Civil Service arm's-length bodies, except the ALB's Principal Accounting Officer, in consultation with the Board, must authorise the expenditure.

■ Former Ministers and Senior Civil Servants: Public Appointments**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[15228\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether his Department has issued guidance on the minimum length of time since leaving government a previous (a) Minister and (b) senior official can be appointed as (i) an Independent Panel Member and (ii) a Senior Independent Panel Member on a public appointments Advisory Assessment Panel.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office has not issued guidance on the composition of Advisory Assessment Panels for public appointments that is specifically in relation to ex-ministers and ex-senior officials becoming panel members.

However, the Cabinet Office publishes the Governance Code on Public Appointments, which sets out general guidance on Advisory Assessment Panels, including requirements around the independence and political activity of panel members.

■ Government Departments: DA Languages**Rupert Lowe:**[\[15632\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much was paid to DA Languages by all Departments in each of the last ten years.

Georgia Gould:

The Cabinet Office does not hold information relating to other Departments' expenditure.

The Cabinet Office has not incurred any spend with DA Languages in each of the last ten years.

■ Labour Force Survey**Neil O'Brien:** [\[15248\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when the outputs from the Transformed Labour Force Survey will be published.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon. Gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 20 November is attached.

Attachments:

1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ15248.pdf]

■ Prime Minister: Anacta**Mike Wood:** [\[15191\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether special advisers in 10 Downing Street have met representatives of Anacta since the general election.

Georgia Gould:

In line with longstanding process, relevant meetings are declared in the Special Advisor transparency publications.

■ Prime Minister: Visits Abroad**Rupert Lowe:** [\[15592\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much the Prime Minister has spent on foreign travel since taking office.

Georgia Gould:

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

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Siân Berry:** [\[901518\]](#)

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

Chris Bryant:

The Government response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report on grassroots music venues outlines our commitment to working across the live music sector to support grassroots music.

We urge the live music industry to introduce a voluntary ticket levy for stadium and arena shows, to support a sustainable grassroots music sector. I am writing to the major players in the industry to underline the importance of swift progress, and on the need to unblock any remaining barriers to an effective industry-led solution.

Following the Autumn Budget, we are continuing to support Arts Council England's Supporting Grassroots Music Fund, which provides grants, including to music venues and festivals.

■ Arts: Young People

Jack Abbott:

[\[901516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to help support young people to access the arts.

Chris Bryant:

Improving access to arts is a priority of this Government, and links to our mission to extend opportunities for children and young people.

DCMS is ensuring that its sectors are engaged in the Department for Education's expert-led, independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, which will seek to deliver a broader curriculum so that children and young people do not miss out on subjects such as music, arts and drama.

We've announced a National Youth Strategy, which will be co-produced together with young people and the youth sector and will prioritise delivering better coordinated youth services and policy at a local, regional and national level.

DCMS also announced £3 million of funding at Autumn Budget to expand the Creative Careers Programme, which will give children the opportunity to learn more about creative career routes.

■ Exercise: Young People

Henry Tufnell:

[\[15591\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of measures in the Autumn Budget 2024 affecting the physical activity sector on (a) health and wellbeing and (b) economic inactivity of people aged between 18 and 24.

Stephanie Peacock:

Our mission-led Government puts children and young people at the heart of our priorities. This includes breaking down barriers to opportunity for young people to access high-quality sport and physical activity, especially those who are less likely to be active.

Sport and physical activity plays a vital role in driving positive public health outcomes. There is also a well-evidenced positive relationship between physical activity, employment and earnings, with being physically active increasing a person's likelihood of being employed.

In the Autumn Budget, the Government committed to support grassroots sport by investing £123 million into the UK-wide Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme in 2024/25, which will support more people to get active wherever they live.

Additionally, the Government's plan to Get Britain Working includes a new Youth Guarantee for all young people aged 18-21 to ensure that they can access quality training opportunities, an apprenticeship or help to find work.

■ Football

Laura Kyrke-Smith: [\[901515\]](#)

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

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government is investing £123 million this year to deliver pitches for grassroots football across the UK.

Alongside this, Sport England has a Movement Fund, which offers crowdfunding pledges, grants and resources to support grassroots sport, including football.

■ Musicians: EU Countries

Stephen Gethins: [\[15756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the UK leaving the EU on touring musicians.

Chris Bryant:

We fully recognise the scale of challenges facing professionals wishing to tour in Europe. Many have concluded it is simply not economically viable or logistically possible to tour in Europe. That denies European audiences the opportunity to hear British artists and it denies artists a chance to build their career. That is why we have pledged to do everything we can to help our touring artists.

We are already working collaboratively with the live music sector to address these key issues for our brilliant musicians, artists and their support staff and are engaging with the EU and EU Member States, with a view to improving arrangements for touring across the European continent without seeing a return to free movement. This is a priority for the whole ministerial team, the department and the government.

■ Sports: Facilities

Alan Strickland: [\[901519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the availability of grassroots sports facilities.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government recognises there is still a significant need for improved grassroots facilities across the UK, which is why we confirmed our continued support at Autumn Budget.

The Government is committed to supporting grassroots facilities, which is why we have invested £123 million into the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme this year.

Across the UK, our approach is that investment should be targeted in order to meet local demand. In England, our delivery partner the Football Foundation plans their investment pipeline in partnership with local authorities, and are revising those plans at present.

DEFENCE

■ British Overseas Territories: Armed Forces

Alicia Kearns:

[\[15476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many UK military personnel are deployed in each Overseas Territory.

Luke Pollard:

The Ministry of Defence has UK military personnel across various UK Overseas Territories. The approximate* breakdown of military personnel permanently based in UK Overseas Territories is as follows:

ASCENSION ISLAND	FALKLAND ISLANDS	GIBRALTAR	THE BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY (BIOT)	THE SOVEREIGN BASE AREAS OF TURKS AND AKROTIRI AND DHEKELIA	CAICOS ISLANDS
20	830	140**	40	2,370	1

In addition to this, across all UK Overseas Territories, there are also personnel deployed on operations.

While there may be other categories of personnel in other UK Overseas Territories, this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

* Personnel change over and transition on a regular basis. With leave and other commitments (such as training), specific numbers may fluctuate.

** This figure excludes the Royal Gibraltar Regiment (RG), around 270 personnel whose home base is Gibraltar.

■ British Overseas Territories: Defence

Alicia Kearns:

[\[15478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, which Minister in his Department is responsible for defence policy on the Overseas Territories.

Luke Pollard:

I am the lead Defence Minister for Overseas Territories.

■ **Israel: F-35 Aircraft**

Zarah Sultana:

[\[15793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an estimate of the proportion of F-35 components exported from the UK to the US that have since been received by Israel Government since October 2023.

Maria Eagle:

The global distribution of F-35 components is controlled by the US Government led F-35 programme. The Government does not have visibility of F-35 components distributed by the programme to each F-35 nation and is unable to provide an estimate.

■ **Ministry of Defence: Disclosure of Information**

James Cartlidge:

[\[15659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, for what reason his Department has removed the Chief of the Defence Staff from the Department's Finance and Economics pre-release access lists, other than the Departmental resources and Statistical Bulletin-MOD Regional Expenditure with UK Industry and Supported Employment releases.

James Cartlidge:

[\[15660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has revoked the Chief of Defence staff's pre-release access to his Department's Departmental resources and statistical bulletin-M.

Maria Eagle:

Pre-release access for Official Statistics are restricted to eligible personnel and regularly reviewed. This is in line with our responsibility under the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (2008) and the Code of Practice for Statistics. In line with the order, these lists must be:

1. Limited to those required to draft, make statements, or take action shortly after the time of publication.
2. Restricted to a minimum number of recipients to maintain public trust.

The MOD Regional Expenditure with UK Industry and Supported Employment (last released 3rd August 2023) has now been rearranged into two statistical releases:

1. the MOD Regional Expenditure statistic,
2. the UK Industry and Supported Employment statistic.

In the routine review of access for these statistics the Chief of Defence Staff was omitted from the new pre-release access lists and has been re-added.

The Chief of the Defence Staff has full access to comprehensive data on MOD programmes and finances, including that which is not published as part of statistical releases.

■ Veterans: LGBT+ People

Jess Brown-Fuller:

[\[15113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of lifting the proposed £50 million cap on reparations for LGBT+ veterans.

Luke Pollard:

Defence is committed to welcoming back LGBT veterans into the Armed Forces community, where they have always belonged. All 49 recommendations made in Lord Etherton's report have been accepted and to date, 38 of the recommendations have already been implemented, demonstrating the Government's commitment to supporting our veterans and the LGBT+ community.

Lord Etherton's report demonstrated the broad range of ways that LGBT+ personnel were impacted by the ban. The financial recognition scheme has been designed with this in mind, intending to provide a sense of closure to all those affected. Defence has worked with experts across Government to design an appropriate scheme where applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis, enabling appropriate distribution of the available funds. The Minister for Veterans and People has met Lord Etherton and LGBT Veterans and he plans to provide a further update on the financial recognition scheme before the end of the year.

EDUCATION

■ Carers: Finance

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[15280\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made a recent assessment of the adequacy of the financial support available to kinship carers.

Janet Daby:

The government recognises the important role that kinship carers play in caring for some of the most vulnerable children.

The government recently announced a £40 million package to trial a new Kinship Allowance in up to ten local authorities to test whether paying an allowance to cover certain costs, such as supporting a child to settle into a new home with relatives, can help increase the number of children taken in by family members and friends.

This is the single biggest kinship care investment made by government to date. This investment could transform the lives of vulnerable children who can no longer live at home.

The programme will begin in 2025 and decisions about future national rollout will be informed by the findings of the evaluation. The department will share further detail on the timetable and delivery of the programme in due course.

■ **Childcare: Costs**

Dr Caroline Johnson: [\[15271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to the minimum wage announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 on the cost of childcare.

Stephen Morgan:

The Autumn Budget 2024 confirmed £1.8 billion in the 2025/26 financial year to support the expansion of the early years entitlement offer for eligible working parents from 15 hours to 30 hours from September 2025. This £1.8 billion will mean the budget for childcare entitlements next year will be over £8 billion, reflecting the additional money needed for the 30 hour expansion, and ensuring funding for the entitlements reflects the national living wage.

■ **Childcare: Employers' Contributions**

Dr Caroline Johnson: [\[15270\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the impact of the increases to employers national insurance contributions on the cost to parents of pre-school childcare.

Stephen Morgan:

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

■ **Children: Social Services**

Laura Trott: [\[15648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her oral statement on Children's Social Care of 18 November 2024, Official Report, column 23, what estimate her Department has made of the cost of her proposed reforms.

Janet Daby:

The department published 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive' on 18 November, setting out our vision for reform to children's social care. Our legislative proposals will keep families together and children safe, remove barriers to opportunity for children in care and care leavers, make the care system child-centred, and tackle profiteering.

To deliver reform across children's social care, the department announced £44 million for 2025/26 at the Autumn Budget 2024 to support children in kinship and foster care, and £90 million to provide safe and suitable homes for some of the most vulnerable children and young people.

The government has confirmed its commitment to further reforms to children's social care in future spending reviews, to make sure every child, irrespective of background, has the best start in life.

■ **Private Education: Special Educational Needs**

Stuart Anderson:

[\[15247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help ensure that the introduction of VAT on private school fees does not negatively impact the academic progress of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Stephen Morgan:

This government is committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity and ensuring every child has access to high quality education. The government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. We are committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs.

At the Autumn Budget 2024, the government announced a £1 billion uplift in high needs funding for the 2025/26 financial year, providing additional support and improving outcomes for the more than a million children in the state sector with SEND.

Pupils who need a local authority funded place in a private school, including those with local authority funded education, health and care (EHC) plans, will not be impacted by the changes. This is because local authorities can reclaim the VAT that will be charged.

Most children with SEND, including most with an EHC plan, are educated in mainstream state funded schools. All state funded schools support children with SEND and all children of compulsory age are entitled to a state funded school place that is free for parents. Where a private school place is necessary to support a child with SEND, the local authority will fund it through an EHC plan.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient state school places in their area. Local authorities routinely support parents who need a state funded school place, including where private schools have closed or where pupils move between schools. The department works with local authorities to support place planning and ensure there is capacity in the state funded sector to meet demand.

Neil O'Brien:

[\[15821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 14487 on Private Education: Special Educational Needs, if she will publish the information that informed her Department's assessment of the potential impact of applying VAT to private school fees on pupils with SEND in private schools moving to state schools.

Stephen Morgan:

HM Treasury (HMT) is responsible for VAT policy and publishing the impacts of the policy.

HMT has published an assessment of the impacts of removing the VAT exemption that applied to private school fees. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-on-private-school-fees/ac8c20ce-4824-462d-b206-26a567724643#who-is-likely-to-be-affected>.

Additionally, HMT published policy costings for applying the standard rate of VAT to private schools alongside the Autumn Budget 2024 on 30 October, which can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6721d2c54da1c0d41942a8d2/Policy_Costing_Document_-_Autumn_Budget_2024.pdf.

As the impact assessment publication sets out, the government estimates that only a very small minority of private school pupils (6%) will move and that most school moves will occur at natural transition points, which will reduce overall disruption. Longer term impacts on this group may be lessened by revenue raised by this measure being used to help the 94% of children who attend state schools, including over one million children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

There is no separate assessment by SEND. It is important to note that pupils who need a local authority-funded place in a private school will not be impacted by the changes. To protect pupils with special educational needs that can only be met in a private school, local authorities and devolved governments that fund these places will be compensated for the VAT they are charged on those pupils' fees.

■ Special Educational Needs: Costs**Neil O'Brien:****[15822]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate her Department has made of the average cost of a child receiving SEND support in a state school.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

The department does not have the data to make an estimate of the average cost of a child receiving SEND support because no information is collected from schools on how much they spend on SEND support for individual children. To require schools to provide such information would involve placing significant burdens on schools. To calculate such costs, schools would need to apportion between pupils with SEND the time and attention teachers and other staff give to those pupils, and costs for other forms of support they receive individually, in groups or as part of whole class teaching.

■ Special Educational Needs: Finance

Monica Harding:

[15582]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what formula her Department is using to calculate Special Educational Needs and Disability high needs funding allocations for local authorities next year.

Catherine McKinnell:

The high needs national funding formula will be used to allocate high needs funding to local authorities in the 2025/26 financial year. Provisional 2025/26 national funding formula allocations for local authorities have now been published and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026>.

For 2025/26, Surrey County Council has been allocated a provisional high needs funding amount of over £239 million. This represents an increase of 7% per head of their projected 2 to 18-year-old population, compared with their 2024/25 formula allocation.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Carbon Capture and Storage

Ian Byrne:

[15269]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to the report entitled Kind of Blue, published by the Carbon Tracker Initiative in June 2024, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of upstream emissions of carbon capture schemes on the government's net zero targets.

Sarah Jones:

As highlighted in the Climate Change Committee's CB6 report, CCUS enabled technologies, including Power, will be essential to achieving net zero. By capturing and storing carbon dioxide, CCUS significantly reduces overall emissions. Emissions from the production of natural gas must reduce significantly both in the UK and globally. Through the North Sea Transition Deal DESNZ is working with industry to cut emissions from upstream production by 50% from 2018 levels by 2030.

Internationally, the UK is a member of the Global Methane Pledge to collectively reduce global methane emissions by at least 30% by 2030 compared to 2020 levels.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Staff

Wera Hobhouse:

[15480]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many civil servants in his Department are working on (a) demand flexibility, (b) Great British Energy, (c) hydrogen, (d) carbon capture and storage, (e) nuclear energy, (f) the review of electricity market arrangements, (g) heat electrification and (h) biomass.

Michael Shanks:

The Department has around 4500 full time equivalents (FTE) working across multiple policy areas and programmes. These include demand flexibility, Great British Energy, Carbon capture, utilisation and storage, hydrogen, nuclear, the review of electricity market arrangements, heat electrification and biomass, amongst others. The Department's resourcing is recorded and aligned to its organisation structure, rather than to portfolios. This means we are unable to provide a detailed breakdown for each of the areas mentioned.

■ **Hydrogen****Sir Alec Shelbrooke:**[\[15435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether it is his target to produce 10GW of green hydrogen by 2030; and if he will take steps to publish a roadmap for meeting this target.

Sarah Jones:

This Government is focussed on getting the UK's first low carbon hydrogen production projects built, which is why in the Autumn Budget we committed £2.3bn in revenue funding for 11 green hydrogen projects from the first Hydrogen Allocation Round (HAR1). The second Hydrogen Allocation Round is now underway to support further green hydrogen production capacity. The Government is also supporting carbon capture and storage enabled hydrogen production and in October 2024 we announced up to £21.7bn of available funding over 25 years to launch the UK's new CCUS industry.

We will publish a Hydrogen Strategy Update to the Market this winter, including further information on recent hydrogen developments and a forward look.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS■ **Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Lee Anderson:**[\[14651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to increase domestic food security, in the context of recent changes to the rules for Agricultural Property Relief.

Daniel Zeichner:

Food security is national security. We need a resilient and healthy food system that works with nature and supports British farmers, fishers and food producers. That is why this Government will introduce a new deal for farmers to boost rural economic growth and strengthen Britain's food security.

This Government will: cut energy bills by switching on GB Energy; protect farmers from being undercut in trade deals; and use the Government's own purchasing power to back British produce.

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief [here](#), and further explanatory information [here](#).

■ Agriculture: Land

Steve Barclay: **[12073]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what data the Rural Payments Agency holds on the (a) area and (b) value of (i) farms and (ii) farmland at a (A) hereditament and (B) local authority level.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) does not hold data at hereditament level, or any data on values of farms or farmland.

It does hold data on areas of land for businesses registered with the RPA and associated agricultural land, i.e. land registered as Arable, Pasture and Permanent Crops.

■ Agriculture: Subsidies

Helen Whately: **[R] [15461]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme beyond 31 December 2025.

Helen Whately: **[R] [15504]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to make a decision on the future of the Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme.

Helen Whately: **[R] [15506]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with producer organisations on the Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government appreciates and values the vital work of our fruit and vegetable growers and Producer Organisations and recognises their important role in maintaining a secure supply of home – grown fresh produce.

As part of our mission-driven Government, and in partnership with the sector, the Department is considering how we can achieve our ambitious, measurable and long-term goals for the sector, including how to recognise the sector's diversity and specialist needs.

Defra officials meet regularly with growers to discuss a range of issues. These discussions help inform future policy development and help us understand what support the sector needs to help it thrive.

■ Catering: Waste**Sarah Dyke:**[\[15871\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of banning single-use food service materials for dine-in settings that have more than 20 covers.

Mary Creagh:

This Government is committed to moving to a circular economy for plastics - a future where we keep our resources in use for longer; waste is reduced; we accelerate the path to net zero; we see investment in critical infrastructure and green jobs; our economy prospers; and nature thrives. As a part of this transition, managing and reducing plastic waste will be crucial.

The Government has not fully assessed the option to ban single-use food service materials for dine-in settings that have more than 20 covers. We continue to review the latest evidence on problematic products and/or materials to take a systematic approach, in line with circular economy principles, to reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastic products and encouraging reuse solutions.

■ Convention on Biological Diversity**Dan Norris:**[\[15409\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the outcomes of the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP16); and what steps he is taking to help achieve those outcomes.

Mary Creagh:

The UN Biodiversity Conference (COP16) was the first opportunity for Parties to take stock of the progress made in implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) adopted at COP15. 27 important decisions were taken at COP16, including relating to climate change, health, and the marine environment. The decision adopted on digital sequence information (DSI) on genetic resources agreed the modalities for operationalising the multilateral benefit sharing mechanism for the use of DSI, and this has the potential to generate new financial resources for nature restoration globally. At the same time, the Government remains disappointed that COP16 concluded before it was possible to reach an agreement on the strategy for mobilising more international finance for nature, and we look forward to resuming discussions on this critical issue as quickly as possible.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Advisory Services**Sir Geoffrey Cox:**[\[15178\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to support business advisory services such as (a) Business Information Point West Devon and (b) the Future Farming Resilience Program.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Farming Resilience Fund (FRF) was developed to help farmers through the early years of the Agricultural Transition, specifically to assist farm businesses to adapt to the initial reductions in the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

Feedback about the FRF has been overwhelmingly positive, including about the services offered by Business Information Point on behalf of Devon County Council.

Defra will carefully consider the findings from the Farming Resilience Fund, alongside other advisory programs, to shape what any future support might look like.

■ Domestic Waste: Recycling**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[15244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will issue updated guidance on household recycling collections.

Mary Creagh:

Simpler Recycling will mean that people across England will be able to recycle the same materials at home, work or school, ending the confusion over what can or cannot be recycled in different parts of the country.

Ministers are currently reviewing final Simpler Recycling policy decisions, including guidance on the approach to collections, and we hope to provide further certainty and clarity to stakeholders as soon as possible.

■ Farmers: Advisory Services**Ben Maguire:**[\[15590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Future Farm Resilience Fund beyond March 2025.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra will carefully consider the findings from the Farming Resilience Fund (FRF), alongside other advisory programs, to shape what any future support might look like.

The FRF was developed to help farmers through the early years of the Agricultural Transition, specifically to assist farm businesses to adapt to the initial reductions in the Basic Payment Scheme.

Defra has received feedback suggesting many participants have recognised the value of the advice provided and it is our hope that many of the relationships and connections built through the FRF will continue beyond the scheme's official end date.

■ Farmers: Demonstrations

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14199\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department plan to attend the NFU farming rally on 19 November 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs spoke to farmers who attended the NFU farming rally on 19 November and has had frequent engagement with the farming sector, including with NFU President Tom Bradshaw the evening before the rally.

Ministers have had further meetings with key industry organisations, including the Country Land and Business Association Conference. Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner met with the NFU, British Retail Consortium, Food and Drink Federation, and UK Hospitality. He also spoke at the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution parliamentary reception. He has also recently spoken at the Northern Farming Conference, the Eggs and Poultry Industry conference, the Agricultural Industries Confederation conference and the Tenant Farmers Association Executive Committee.

■ Farmers: Forms

Rupert Lowe:

[\[11716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what forms his Department requires farmers to complete each year; what the length of these forms are; and what steps his Department is taking to help reduce the administration burden on farmers.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government does not require the same forms annually, and therefore we cannot provide this information. However, we are committed to improving the services we offer to farmers. Through ongoing service design and research with farmers, we continue to optimise our farming schemes, including the administration they include, to make published content clear and by iterating form design, so they work efficiently for farmers, food security and the environment, especially for those that are too often ignored such as small, grassland, upland and tenanted farms. This is a priority for the new Government and we will announce more information in due course.

In the meantime, the Animal and Plant Health Agency's (APHA) strategic programme is focused on enhancing and streamlining services, including customer communications, application processes, forms, and data collection. This initiative includes multiple projects aimed at understanding and alleviating the administrative load faced by farmers and other stakeholders.

As part of this programme, APHA has already conducted extensive user research, engaging customers across various sectors to identify their challenges and pain

points. By listening directly to those who use its services, APHA is gaining valuable insights that allow it to evaluate and test solutions to make interactions with APHA smoother and more efficient.

■ Farms: Valuation

Tim Farron:

[\[13216\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many farm holdings are worth more than £1,000,000, by constituency.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra does not hold financial data for farms at holding level.

■ Flood Control

Shaun Davies:

[\[14491\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress his Department has made on improving flood resilience and response in England.

Emma Hardy:

In just five months in Government, we have introduced a series of measures to better protect communities from flooding including:

- Invest £2.4 billion over the next two years to maintain, repair and build flood defences to protect communities across the country.
- Set up a new Floods Resilience Taskforce bringing together representatives from central and local government, Local Resilience Forums, emergency responders and the National Farmers Union, among others, to discuss how they will speed up and co-ordinate flooding preparation and resilience.
- Consultation to review the existing funding formula, ensuring the challenges facing businesses and rural and coastal communities are adequately considered.
- Invested £50 million to Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) to better enable them to manage water levels for agriculture and environmental needs.
- Supporting farmers impacted by flooding through a £60 million Farming Recovery Fund, which provides grants of up to £25,000 to return their land to the condition it was in before storm damage.

■ Lead: Contamination

Sir Julian Smith:

[\[13210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of the extent of sediment-associated lead contamination in (a) river channels and (b) floodplains downstream of historical lead mines; and if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the Environment Agency's focus on water pollution in addressing this risk.

Emma Hardy:

In 2008, the Environment Agency (EA) published the report: [Assessment of metal mining contaminated river sediments in England and Wales - GOV.UK](#). The report brought together all available information on metal concentrations in river sediments, riverbanks and floodplain soils downstream of abandoned metal mines. This confirmed:

- The long history of metal mining in England has contaminated sediments in rivers, estuaries and lakes, as well as floodplain soils with a range of metals, particularly lead, cadmium, zinc and copper.
- Although metal discharges were greater during the peak period of active mining in the nineteenth century, inputs of dissolved and particulate metals still occur. Past discharges have left a reservoir of highly contaminated sediments in lowland rivers many kilometres downstream of the mines.
- This metal contamination may pose a risk to aquatic wildlife and agriculture, but the report did not assess these risks.

Through Defra's Water and Abandoned Metal Mines (WAMM) Programme, the EA is working with the Coal Authority to tackle water pollution from abandoned metal mines. The government has a legally binding target to halve the length of rivers polluted by metals, including lead, from abandoned metal mines by 2038. Through diffuse interventions and treatment schemes, WAMM has already improved water quality in ~100 km of rivers.

Local Authorities are responsible for identifying contaminated land under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This includes where floodplains exist downstream of historic lead mines if lead washed out of rivers is causing an unacceptable risk to people, crops, or livestock.

Defra recently commissioned the EA to produce another State of Contaminated Land Report. The EA will seek to include additional questions in this desk-based survey to find out if Local Councils are assessing contaminated land risks downstream of historical lead mines.

■ National Landscapes: Agriculture**Dame Harriett Baldwin:****[14960]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much he plans to allocate to the Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund in (a) 2025/26 and (b) 2026/27.

Mary Creagh:

We will confirm plans for Farming in Protected Landscapes in 2025/26 in due course. The budget beyond 2025/26 is to be settled in phase 2 of the Spending Review.

■ Packaging: Recycling

Sarah Dyke:

[\[15870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of using (a) refillable and (b) returnable packaging to help support the transition to become a circular economy.

Mary Creagh:

Refillable and returnable packaging is a key part of supporting the transition to a circular economy. Defra is working with WRAP to identify and analyse measures that could be used to encourage greater use of refillable and returnable packaging.

■ Plastics: Treaties

Alex Easton:

[\[13352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his policy is on (a) chemical recycling and (b) the mass balance approach at the INC5 negotiations for the UN Global Plastics Treaty.

Emma Hardy:

At the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop a new UN Plastic Pollution Treaty, the UK will align with our domestic policy on any provisions related to chemical recycling.

The UK recognises that chemical recycling technologies can offer a complementary route to support the transition towards a circular economy, where mechanical recycling is unfeasible or uneconomic and where this waste may otherwise be incinerated.

Our domestic policy will inform our position on any provisions related to chemical recycling, including the mass balance approach, that are negotiated at the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop a new UN Plastics Pollution Treaty.

■ Rural England Prosperity Fund

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[\[14959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much he plans to allocate to the Rural England Prosperity Fund in (a) 2025/26 and (b) 2026/27.

Sarah Dyke:

[\[15134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to extend the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Autumn Statement on 30 October confirmed Defra's budgets for 2024-25 and 2025-26. Funding allocations for individual programmes for the next financial year will be determined in upcoming months through the department's business planning exercise.

The department is working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and will update on the Rural England Prosperity Fund in due course.

■ Veterinary Services: UK Trade with EU

Richard Baker: [\[14549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress he has made on UK-EU veterinary agreement negotiations.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Prime Minister and President of the European Commission met on 7 November at the EPC in Budapest, where they discussed the strength of the UK-EU partnership and the need to work together to tackle the challenges facing Europe.

Defra's approach to UK-EU relations will always respect the role of devolved governments and legislatures. The Government knows that many aspects of the Withdrawal Agreement and UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement fall within devolved competence, and there are many reserved aspects of particular importance to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

■ Water Abstraction: Licensing

Ben Goldsborough: [\[15389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 13929 on Water Abstraction: Licensing, what the regional breakdown of these water abstraction licences was in each of the last 10 financial years.

Emma Hardy:

The number of water abstraction licences (temporary, full and transfer) live for all or part of the financial year for each of the last ten financial years is shown in the tables below. This data is shown by former Environment Agency (EA) regions.

This had been done by former EA regions to ensure consistency and allow comparison, as the EA changed its area boundaries in 2016.

For the purposes of this analysis, the boundary of each former EA region is river catchment based.

Also, these figures are for the country of England only. Figures for the former 'Wales' and 'Midlands' EA regions only include water abstraction licences with abstraction points located in England.

FORMER EA

REGION	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Anglian	4761	4717	4610	4488	4556
Wales	450	447	434	408	413

FORMER EA					
REGION	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Midlands	3566	3506	3481	3386	3299
North East	2184	2162	2140	2065	2033
North West	1657	1675	1645	1615	1606
South West	2225	2179	2165	2049	2023
Southern	1702	1669	1642	1631	1567
Thames	1689	1672	1648	1607	1603
Total	18234	18027	17765	17249	17100

FORMER EA					
REGION	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Anglian	4466	4507	4580	4640	4656
Wales	412	471	474	471	465
Midlands	3277	3339	3320	3482	3447
North East	2028	2115	2104	2152	2157
North West	1576	1580	1600	1621	1609
South West	2002	1999	2021	2055	2054
Southern	1566	1551	1639	1687	1677
Thames	1613	1622	1648	1706	1714
Total	16940	17184	17386	17814	17779

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ Alexei Zimin

Alicia Kearns:

[\[14475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if his Department will request from the Serbian authorities the results of any (a) investigation into the death and (b) autopsy of Alexei Zimin.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is providing consular support to Alexei Zimin's family following his death in Belgrade. Local authorities decide whether to conduct postmortems and investigations following deaths. Not all deaths are investigated, for example if it is clear the death was of natural causes. The results of investigations may take months. Families can request information via local authorities. If families wish us to do so, FCDO officials can formally register interest in an investigation on the family's behalf which may result in local authorities sharing information with families directly or via FCDO. If a British national's body is repatriated to England and Wales, HM Coroners may ask for information from overseas authorities. The FCDO can place a request on their behalf. HM Coroners cannot hold inquests in cases of burials or cremations overseas.

■ British Council: Finance**Tim Roca:**[\[14865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the financial situation of the British Council.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

In 2024/25, the FCDO will provide the British Council with £162.5 million Grant-in-Aid funding. The British Council is projected to generate £885 million from other sources over the same period, according to its Corporate Plan 2024-25. This self-generated income is largely derived from the British Council's teaching and exams businesses.

The Government is committed to a successful British Council that is financially stable. Our funding to the British Council underlines our support.

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**Priti Patel:**[\[14308\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the (a) current and (b) incoming United States Administration on the timetable for signing the treaty with Mauritius on the future sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with Secretary Blinken on a range of issues, including the British Indian Ocean Territory / Chagos Archipelago.

We look forward to continuing to engage with the current and incoming US Administrations in the usual way to protect and enhance our shared security interests.

Gregory Stafford:[\[16060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the agreement with Mauritius on the British Indian Ocean Territory on global security.

Stephen Doughty:

The base on Diego Garcia is critical to national and international security. It has enabled the UK, the US, and our allies and partners to combat some of the most challenging threats to global peace and security, including those from terrorism, organised crime, and wider instability.

Following this agreement, for the first time in over 50 years, the base will be undisputed and legally secure, able to operate to its full strategic capability without risk of challenge. The Agreement will mean that the UK and US will continue to operate the base well into the next century with strong protections from malign influence.

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sri Lanka**Nick Timothy:**[\[14747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether criminal charges (a) have been made and (b) convictions have been secured against Sri Lankan nationals on Diego Garcia by BIOT authorities.

Stephen Doughty:

Where allegations of criminality are made on BIOT, they are investigated by the authorities there and criminal charges brought and prosecuted where appropriate.

■ Colombia: Ceasefires**Fabian Hamilton:**[\[15411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of reports of an extension of a ceasefire between the Colombian government and the Estado Mayor Central group.

Catherine West:

The UK supports Colombian efforts to achieve a sustainable and long-lasting peace, including through implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement and support from the UN Verification Mission. We welcome the renewal of the UN's mandate, which included willingness to consider future monitoring and verification of the ceasefire with Estado Mayor Central. Through our role as penholder at the UN Security Council the UK works with the Government, civil society, and international partners to support peace in Colombia. We regularly discuss the peace process with the Colombian Government at the highest levels. The PM met President Petro in the margins of the G20 and Foreign Secretary met Foreign Minister Murillo at COP29 and reiterated the UK's support for peace. Baroness Chapman also reiterated the UK's support for

peace in Colombia during her visit to Bogota in November, including during her discussion with Vice Foreign Minister Jorge Rojas.

■ Development Aid

Mr Andrew Mitchell:

[\[14914\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether any in-country programming will be (a) curtailed, (b) cancelled and (c) postponed as a result of changes to budget allocations since 5 July 2024.

Anneliese Dodds:

We are finalising FCDO ODA allocations for 2024/25 and will publish them shortly. Over the coming months, we will also decide how to allocate our 2025/26 ODA allocations; these will be published in due course. We are determined to deliver our international development mission, lay the foundations for our ODA spending in the years to come and avoid the turbulence of recent years. 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.

■ Georgia: Elections

Stephen Gethins:

[\[15755\]](#)

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 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's publication entitled Georgia, Parliamentary Elections, 26 October 2024: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, published on 25 October 2024.

Stephen Doughty:

I fully endorse the findings of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights report. I made this clear in my statement of 27 October, and our Embassy in Tbilisi reiterated our concerns regarding the need to transparently and thoroughly investigate allegations of electoral violations in a further public statement on 25 November. The new Georgian Government must ensure that these concerns are addressed, and return to a trajectory inline with the democratic values expected of an aspirant NATO member.

■ Hamas and Israel: Arrest Warrants

Tom Hayes:

[\[15589\]](#)

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 decision by the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for (a) Benjamin Netanyahu, (b) Yoav Gallant and (c) Mohammed Deif.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We respect the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern. We remain focused on pushing for an immediate ceasefire, to bring an end to the devastating violence in Gaza. This is essential to protect civilians, ensure the release of hostages and to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza.

■ **IRA: Libya****Mike Martin:**[\[901427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps with Cabinet colleagues to publish the findings of the Shawcross report on compensation for victims of Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK Government has profound sympathy for UK victims of Qadhafi-sponsored IRA terrorism and indeed for all victims of the Troubles. The Shawcross Report was commissioned by the previous government as an internal report drawing on a series of private and confidential conversations. We will keep decisions on publication regarding the Shawcross Report under review.

■ **Iran: Religious Freedom****Jim Shannon:**[\[14621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of targeted sanctions against violators of freedom of religion or belief in Iran.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK continues to champion Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all in Iran, and beyond. No one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We condemn Iran's restrictions against FoRB and we are committed to holding Iran to account for its attacks against religious minorities, including at the UN Third Committee.

We maintain sanctions on senior Iranian decision makers responsible for human rights violations and will continue to respond to Iran's repression of fundamental rights, including through the potential use of further sanctions.

■ **Moldova: Disinformation****Stephen Gethins:**[\[15754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to help counter disinformation in Moldova.

Stephen Doughty:

As the Foreign Secretary made clear during his visit to Moldova on 20 November, the UK is committed to supporting Moldova's democratic resilience in the face of Russian hybrid aggression. During my visit to Chisinau on 16-17 September, I met President Sandu, Deputy Prime Minister Popsoi and Defence Minister Nosatii to reaffirm the UK's steadfast support. This year alone, the UK is providing £34 million of humanitarian, development and defence support to Moldova, including £6.3 million through the Good Governance Fund to strengthen Moldova's capacity to respond to internal and external threats including information threats.

■ **Russia: Apple****Mark Pritchard:**[\[14919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will have discussions with Apple on its reported removal of apps linked to Russian opposition supporters from its Russian app store.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK Government condemns the Russian authorities' use of censorship to punish political opposition, repress anti-war sentiment and clamp down on freedom of expression online. The UK has raised Russia's use of repressive legislation to maintain a climate of fear in multilateral fora, most recently at the UN on 29 October. The UK Government stands in solidarity with Russian independent journalists, human rights defenders and civil society activists who continue their work, including online, at great personal risk. The UK Government has regular engagement with Apple on a variety of matters.

■ **Russia: Ukraine****Mark Pritchard:**[\[14918\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is taking steps to support the release of Ukrainian civilians taken hostage by the Russian military who are not subject to the military prisoner exchange programme.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK consistently draws attention to Russia's abhorrent actions in Ukraine, including arbitrary detentions of civilians. In the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, alongside other participating states, we have invoked the Moscow Mechanism four times since Russia's full-scale invasion. The most recent of these reports, published in April, exposed Russia's arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians. We call again on Russia to uphold its obligations under International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, and to release all arbitrarily detained civilians.

■ Russia: YouTube

Mark Pritchard:

[\[14954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will have discussions with YouTube on its policy on (a) advertising and (b) monetisation by Russian opposition supporters on its platform.

Stephen Doughty:

The Government stands in solidarity with Russian independent journalists, human rights defenders and civil society activists who continue their work, including online, at great personal risk. We condemn the Russian authorities' use of repressive legislation to severely curtail the freedom of expression and recognise the importance of the limited online platforms still available in Russia. The Government has regular engagement with Google, which owns YouTube, on a variety of matters.

■ Saudi Arabia: Capital Punishment

Rachael Maskell:

[\[14665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Saudi counterpart on the (a) policy and (b) scale of capital punishment in that country.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK opposes the death penalty in all circumstances as our joint statement with the EU on World Day Against the Death Penalty made clear. The Saudi authorities are well aware of our opposition. As the Minister for the Middle East, I raised Saudi human rights during my recent visit to the Kingdom.

■ Syria: Turkey

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[15621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of recent Turkish airstrikes in Northeastern Syria on the humanitarian situation in the area.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK, together with our humanitarian partners, is closely monitoring the impacts of recent Turkish airstrikes in North East Syria and continues to provide life-saving humanitarian support there. UK officials regularly engage with Turkey on the situation in North East Syria, most recently on 26 November. The UK recognises Turkey's legitimate security interests in Syria but also the need to protect civilian lives and infrastructure, and to avoid destabilising activity. Stability in the region is essential to prevent the worsening of the already serious humanitarian situation in northern Syria and enable the Global Coalition and its partners to continue the fight against Daesh.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE■ **Alan Milburn****Nick Timothy:**[\[15048\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many meetings Alan Milburn attended with (a) ministers and (b) officials in his Department between 5 July 2024 and 9 November 2024; and how his Department communicated with Mr Milburn in that period.

Karin Smyth:

As my Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, said in Parliament on 9 September 2024, “The right honourable Alan Milburn is a former Member of this House, a member of the Privy Council and a former Health Secretary. There is a clear distinction between inviting people with a wide range of experience and perspectives into the Department to have policy debates and to generate ideas, and having meetings that are about transacting Government business. I can assure the House that nothing commercially sensitive has been shared with Alan Milburn.”

He also said that “transparency matters. That is why meetings in the Department, and their attendees, will be published in the right and proper way on a quarterly basis.” As part of this quarterly return, and in line with guidance, we will be listing the purpose of the meetings.

■ **Brain Cancer: Health Services****Harriet Cross:**[\[15703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of developing a dedicated national brain tumour strategy within the Major Conditions Strategy framework to help improve (a) early diagnosis rates, (b) research funding allocation, (c) access to Clinical Nurse Specialists and (d) treatment outcomes for patients with brain tumours.

Andrew Gwynne:

Plans to publish a final major conditions strategy were paused following the announcement of the general election. We are developing a 10-year plan to radically reform the National Health Service, and My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been clear that there needs to be a national cancer plan, which will include brain cancer. We are currently in discussions about this plan and its relationship to the 10-Year Health Plan and the Government’s wider health mission.

To improve early diagnosis rates for brain cancer, we have expanded general practice direct access to diagnostic scans, including brain magnetic resonance imaging.

In September 2024, the Government announced new research opportunities, including a National Institute for Health Care and Research Brain Tumour Research Consortium and a funding call to generate high quality evidence in brain tumour care, support, and rehabilitation.

To improve outcomes, NHS England is committed to ensuring that all cancer patients are offered Holistic Needs Assessment and Personalised Care and Support Planning, ensuring care is focused on what matters most to each person. As well as this, all patients, including those with secondary cancers, will have access to the right expertise and support, including a Clinical Nurse Specialist or other support worker.

■ **Breast Cancer: Greater London**

Mr Paul Kohler:

[\[15711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve breast cancer screening in (a) London and (b) Wimbledon constituency.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 27 November 2024]: NHS England has developed a national improvement plan, in collaboration with key stakeholders such as cancer alliances, to improve uptake within the breast screening programme.

The plan sets out the priorities, interventions, and the monitoring of impacts and outcomes to be achieved to improve uptake, through: expanding access; data and analytics; reducing inequalities; contracting; communication; and IT developments.

■ **Cancer: Health Services**

Steff Aquarone:

[\[14440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether (a) pancreatic cancer and (b) other cancers with lower survival rates will have a focused section in the new cancer strategy.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 19 November 2024]: The Government's Health Mission sets the aim of building a National Health Service fit for the future and reducing the lives lost to the biggest killers, including cancer.

As part of that work, and in response to Lord Darzi's report, we have launched an extensive programme of engagement to develop a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS, including further detail pancreatic cancer and other cancers with lower survival rates. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts from hospitals to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention.

In addition, following publication of the 10-Year Health Plan, we will develop a new national cancer plan, which will include further details on how we will improve outcomes for cancer patients including those with pancreatic cancer and other cancers with lower survival rates.

We are now in discussions about what form that plan should take, and what its relationship to the 10-Year Health Plan and the Government's wider Health Mission should be, and will provide updates on this in due course.

■ Childbirth

Dr Caroline Johnson: [\[15267\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to reduce perineal injury during vaginal deliveries.

Karin Smyth:

Integrated care boards are rolling out the Perinatal Pelvic Health Services (PPHS) across England, to reduce the rates of perineal tears and improve outcomes for women.

A national service specification was published in October 2023 that set out the expected standards of care for prevention, identification, and access to physiotherapy for pelvic health issues during pregnancy and at least one year after birth. This includes the implementation of the Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injuries (OASI) care bundle to reduce perineal injury in childbirth, which is a significant factor for pelvic health problems. This included perineal training and a new best practice framework for healthcare professionals, covering prevention and care under the OASI pathway. Further information on the service specification is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PRN00147-Service-specification-perinatal-pelvic-health-services.pdf>

PPHS' also work with maternity and physiotherapy services to provide quality information about the risk of developing pelvic health problems, key signs of pelvic floor dysfunction, and preventative measures like pelvic floor exercises.

■ Defibrillators

James McMurdock: [\[16034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to educate the public about the (a) use and (b) availability of defibrillators.

James McMurdock: [\[16035\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to improve (a) cardiopulmonary resuscitation and (b) automated external defibrillator training for the public (i) in residential areas and (ii) generally.

James McMurdock: [\[16036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to ensure access to defibrillators in (a) rural areas and (b) areas where ambulance response times are longer.

James McMurdock: [\[16037\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to collaborate with (a) emergency services, (b) local councils and (c) charities to coordinate automated external defibrillator (i) installation and (ii) maintenance.

James McMurdock: [\[16038\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure the (a) long-term maintenance and (b) functionality of publicly accessible defibrillators.

James McMurdock: [\[16039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of (a) mandating and (b) incentivising the inclusion of defibrillators in (i) existing housing estates and (ii) urban developments.

James McMurdock: [\[16040\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking with housing developers to support (a) the installation of automated external defibrillators and (b) other public health initiatives.

James McMurdock: [\[16041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the availability of automated external defibrillators in (a) residential areas where cardiac arrests are most prevalent and (b) other residential areas.

James McMurdock: [\[16042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of integrating new automated external defibrillators into existing national databases to help increase (a) the accessibility and (b) awareness of those devices.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to improving access to Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) in public spaces, and reducing inequalities in access to these life saving devices. Following the depletion of the existing AED fund, launched in September 2023, the Government approved a further £500,000 in August 2024 to fulfil existing applications to the fund.

The Department selected a joint bid from Smarter Society as its independent partners to manage grant applications. Smarter Society has reviewed the funding applications against the requirements specified by the Department. These requirements are to ensure that resources are allocated where there is the greatest need, for instance in remote communities with extended ambulance response times, places with high footfall and high population densities, hotspots for cardiac arrest including sporting venues and venues with vulnerable people, and deprived areas.

As part of the Department's requirements, the defibrillators are suitable for use by untrained persons. The Mindray C1A Defibrillator, a fully automated device suitable for use by untrained persons, are the AEDs provided by Smarter Society, in partnership with London Hearts charity. When an AED is installed on the external wall of a building, Smarter Society advises the guardian that the AED is listed on the public liability insurance in case of loss or theft.

Once installed, these defibrillators are required to be registered on The Circuit, a national defibrillator and ambulance service database, operated independently by the British Heart Foundation, in collaboration with the National Health Service. Upon registration, contact details are provided for the nominated AED guardian or guardians, who are local to the defibrillator's location, and conduct checks when required. The registered guardian receives an automatic email or text message notification if the defibrillator has potentially been used, therefore prompting the guardian to conduct a check. The Circuit records the potential use of each registered defibrillator. The registered guardian of the defibrillator will automatically be contacted if their AED is potentially used, and may therefore require replacement pads. In addition, The Circuit will also send out an automatic notification to the guardian approximately three months before the AED's battery or pads expire.

Following the use of an AED machine, they do not require resetting. The only maintenance required is to change battery after five years. The pads must be replaced at the point of expiry, with a minimum three-year lifespan, or after each use. London Hearts, the supplier for the Community AED programme, runs a free pad program and discounts the costs for replacements.

The Department does not hold data on AEDs installed on Government buildings, or whether those AEDs are registered on The Circuit.

The Department has continued its partnership with Smarter Society, who managed the grant applications on our behalf, with London Hearts supplying the AEDs. London Hearts is the leading heart defibrillator charity in the United Kingdom, supporting communities with the provision of life saving heart defibrillators, and teaching cardiopulmonary resuscitation and defibrillator skills.

NHS England has partnered with St John Ambulance to co-ordinate skills development, to significantly increase the use of AEDs by individuals in community settings. This includes a national network of Community Advocates to champion the importance of first aid, training 60,000 people that will help save up to 4,000 lives each year by 2028.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[9620\]](#)

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

Karin Smyth:

The following table shows the percentage of desks that were occupied in the most recent four weeks at our London headquarters on Victoria Street, as we do not routinely collect occupancy data in our other offices:

WEEK COMMENCING	PERCENTAGE OF DESKS OCCUPIED
2 September 2024	76%
9 September 2024	81%
16 September 2024	79%
23 September 2024	74%

The Department does not record staff office attendance and just measures office occupancy.

■ **Drugs: Safety**

Ben Obese-Jecty:

[\[15874\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 901341 on Drugs: Safety, what the outcome was of the recent ministerial roundtable.

Karin Smyth:

Following this roundtable, the Government is developing its strategy to support a move away from the use of animals, in favour of suitable alternative methods, in both basic scientific research and in the development of products, and also in the regulatory oversight thereof. This involves input from representatives of those organisations who were present at the roundtable. A detailed strategy document will be published early in the new year.

■ **Family Hubs: Sheffield**

Gill Furniss:

[\[15650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support Start for Life services in Sheffield; and if he will make it his policy to extend funding beyond 1 April 2025.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Family Hubs and Start for Life programme is central to the Government's commitments to give every baby the best start in life, and to deliver the healthiest generation of children ever.

Sheffield is one of 75 local authorities the Government is funding to ensure parents and carers can access Start for Life services from conception to the age of two years old. We work closely with them to support programme implementation across all funded strands, and they have opened seven Family Hub sites with Start for Life services at their heart since 2023. We also signpost policy toolkits, provide guidance, and facilitate the sharing of good practice between local authorities.

The Autumn Budget announcement included £69 million to continue delivery of a network of Family Hubs in 2025/26. The Department will confirm Start for Life funding in due course.

■ Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Health Services

Helen Grant:

[15645]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve (a) prevention, (b) diagnosis and (c) support for people affected by foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department has taken a number of steps to help prevent foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). The UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines, published in 2016, provide clear advice to women not to drink alcohol if they are planning for a pregnancy or are pregnant, and are available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80b7ed40f0b623026951db/UK_CM_Os_report.pdf

The National Health Service website offers advice on the use of alcohol during pregnancy and sources of support, which includes speaking to a general practitioner, midwife, or local treatment service, or contacting the Government's Talk to Frank website. Further information on the NHS website's advice on the use of alcohol during pregnancy and sources of support, and the Government's Talk to Frank website is available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/drinking-alcohol-while-pregnant/>
www.talktofrank.com/contact-frank

The Department asked the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to produce a Quality Standard in England (QS204) for FASD to help the health and care system improve both diagnosis and support for people affected by FASD. The quality standard also covers support during pregnancy to improve awareness and prevent the disorder. It was published in March 2022, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs204>

The Department will soon be publishing the first ever United Kingdom clinical guidelines on alcohol treatment. The aim of the guidelines is to promote and support good practice and improve quality of service provision, resulting in better outcomes for people experiencing harmful drinking and alcohol dependence. The guidelines will set out how maternity, alcohol treatment, and other healthcare professionals should support women to reduce or stop their alcohol use as quickly and safely as possible, to reduce the ongoing exposure of the foetus to alcohol and the risk and severity of future disability.

■ General Practitioners: South Holland and the Deepings

Sir John Hayes:

[\[15720\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of GP surgeries in South Holland and the Deepings constituency are rated as (a) outstanding and (b) good by the Care Quality Commission.

Stephen Kinnock:

As of 27 November 2024, there are nine general practice surgeries in the South Holland and the Deepings constituency. Of these, one, or 11%, is rated Outstanding, and eight, or 89%, are rated Good by the Care Quality Commission.

■ Genito-urinary Medicine: Health Services

Danny Beales:

[\[15541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is taking steps with NHS England to involve sexual health stakeholders in the development of the 10 Year Health Plan for England.

Danny Beales:

[\[15542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the 10 Year Health Plan for England development team plan to meet with sexual health stakeholders.

Andrew Gwynne:

Improving sexual health services is a priority for the Government and it is important that we capture the views of stakeholders as we develop our 10-Year Health Plan. To support this, we have launched a national engagement exercise. This will be the biggest conversation in the National Health Service's history. We want to hear from a wide range of individuals and organisations, including many sexual health stakeholders. Organisations are encouraged to log onto the online portal and submit a response by 2 December 2024. The online portal is available at the following link:

<https://change.nhs.uk/en-GB/>

We have also published a Workshop in a Box that will support organisations to conduct their own local engagement activities. This is available from the community engagement tab on the abovementioned website from Monday 18 November 2024, with a request that partner organisations collate and upload their insights to the website by 14 February 2025.

■ Genomics: China

Gregory Stafford:

[\[15376\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will exclude (a) BGI Group, (b) MGI Tech and (c) other state-linked genomics companies blacklisted by the United States from public sector health bodies.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government continues to review the evolving national security risks in the life sciences sector, including engaging with partners and allies, while ensuring that the United Kingdom is at the forefront of innovation.

The Procurement Act will come into force in 2025 and will include a Debarment Review Service, which aims to safeguard public procurement from suppliers deemed to pose a risk. As with all national security risks, there will be engagement with colleagues across Cabinet and Parliament to ensure we maintain a robust approach to managing these risks as they evolve.

Gregory Stafford:[\[15377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had discussions with (a) Cabinet colleagues, (b) Genomics England, (c) UK Biobank and (d) NIHR BioResource on (i) BGI Group, (ii) MGI Tech and (iii) other state-linked genomics companies blacklisted by the USA.

Andrew Gwynne:

Through the delivery of the UK Biological Security Strategy, the Government is committed to ensuring the United Kingdom is resilient to a spectrum of biological threats, as well as being a world leader in innovation. As part of this strategy, the Government is undertaking a programme of work to assess how we can minimise the risks from biological data to protect our burgeoning bioeconomy and build confidence in sharing personal data, to improve health outcomes in the UK and across the world.

Department officials are working closely with UK Biobank, Genomics England, and the National Institute for Health and Care Research Bioresource on this programme of work, and there will be continued engagement with my Cabinet colleagues.

Health Insurance: Private Sector**Clive Jones:**[\[15712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of recovering costs from insurance providers when patients with private health insurance seek NHS-funded treatment which would be covered under their health insurance policy.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has made no assessment on recovering National Health Service costs from private health insurance providers, when patients with private health insurance seek NHS-funded treatment which would be covered under their health insurance policy.

However, the Injury Cost Recovery scheme enables trusts to recover the cost of NHS treatment from insurers, where personal injury compensation is paid, for example after a road traffic accident. £180 million was recovered by trusts in 2023/24, for reinvestment in NHS patient services.

■ Health Services: Missing Persons

Rachel Gilmour:

[\[15121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people have been reported missing from (a) hospitals and (b) other health care settings in each of the last four years for which data is available.

Andrew Gwynne:

The following table shows a count of patient safety incidents, reported as occurring where the incident category is absconder or missing patient, broken down by care setting, each year from 2020/21 to 2023/24:

CARE SETTING OF OCCURRENCE	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Acute or general hospital	13,792	15,541	17,545	13,911
Ambulance service	76	64	143	141
Community and general dental service	6	13	61	1
Community nursing, medical and therapy service, including community hospital	814	745	801	309
Community optometry or optician service	81	295	284	0
Community pharmacy	0	1	8	1
General practice	8	3	9	17
Learning disabilities service	143	164	143	94
Mental health service	10,654	11,396	13,281	7,146
Total	25,574	28,222	32,275	21,620

Source: National Reporting and Learning System, NHS England.

Notes:

1. an absconder or missing patient is not a direct equivalent of 'reported missing' as it includes issues such as leaving without signing a discharge against medical advice form, or failing to return from agreed leave on time, rather than consisting solely of reports of patients who abscond or who are reported missing to the police.
2. the data also includes reports of patients who are missing from a follow-up, for instance, those who should have been asked to return to a clinic for review but whose call back for a further appointment has been missed.

■ Long Covid: Health Services

Adrian Ramsay:

[\[15600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2024 to Question 901299 on Long Covid: Health Services, what strategies he recently discussed with stakeholders to stimulate further research into treatments for long covid.

Andrew Gwynne:

On 17 October 2024, I co-chaired a roundtable of researchers and people with lived experience to discuss long COVID research. I highlighted the importance of research in supporting this community, as well as recognising the significant burden of disease. We also discussed next steps for long COVID research, including supporting implementation science and knowledge mobilisation to ensure results translate into policy and practice, supporting researchers and industry partners to deliver intervention studies for new and repurposed treatments, capitalising on synergies with research on other post-viral syndromes, and ensuring long COVID researchers are supported to apply for further funding.

■ National Child Measurement Programme

Rupert Lowe:

[\[15707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the cost is of (a) the National Child Measurement Programme and (b) feedback letters relating to that Programme.

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is a mandatory public health function of local authorities, and collects data on the weight status of children aged four to five years old, who would be in reception, and 10 to 11 years old, who would be in Year 6. The data is used both nationally and locally, to inform child health and obesity policy planning and commissioning.

The NCMP is funded through the Public Health Grant for local authorities, at a cost of £19,967,000 in 2023/24, the latest year for which data on cost is available. Local

authorities determine the method and model of delivery. Local commissioning and delivery therefore varies between local authorities.

Providing feedback to parents in the form of feedback letters is not a mandated component of the NCMP. It is a local authority's decision on whether to notify parents of their children's measurements, and what information and support is offered. The Department does not hold or have access to data on the costs of providing feedback letters to parents. The information is collected at a local authority level, and forms part of the local authority revenue expenditure and financing for social care and public health services on 'obesity – children'.

■ Neurology

Alex Easton:

[11518]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) improve neurology waiting times and (b) help ensure timely access to treatment for people with multiple sclerosis.

Andrew Gwynne:

We are committed to supporting people with long term conditions, including neurological conditions, and ensuring they receive the support that they need, including referral to specialist services as appropriate.

The Government is committed to putting patients first. This means making sure that patients, including patients with multiple sclerosis, are seen on time, and ensuring that people have the best possible experience during their care.

Tackling waiting lists is a key part of our Health Mission. We will deliver an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments, including for neurology, per week, as a first step in our commitment to ensuring patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks.

We will be supporting National Health Service trusts to deliver these through innovation, sharing best practice to increase productivity and efficiency, and ensuring the best value is delivered.

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning most services for people with long term conditions, including neurological conditions. ICBs are allocated funding by NHS England to meet local need and priorities, and improve outcomes. NHS England continues to set national standards, service specifications, and clinical access policies which ICBs are expected to apply.

NHS England's Neuroscience Transformation Programme is supporting ICBs to deliver the right service, at the right time for all neurology patients, including treatment for those with multiple sclerosis. This includes providing care closer to home.

■ Ophthalmic Services: Children

Danny Beales:

[\[15566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what was the average (a) cost and (b) waiting time for an outpatient paediatric ophthalmology appointment in the 2023-24 financial year..

Karin Smyth:

Patients have been let down for too long whilst they wait for the care they need, including children awaiting hospital-based eyecare. The Government will ensure that 92% of patients return to waiting no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment (RTT) within our first term, a standard which has not been met consistently since September 2015. Outpatient services make up most of elective activity, so transforming outpatient services is a key part of our approach to cutting paediatric waiting times.

In 2023/24, the national mean average unit cost of an outpatient paediatric ophthalmology attendance without a procedure was £140, and the mean average national unit cost of a paediatric ophthalmology outpatient procedure was £248. In 2023/24, the median average waiting time for a first outpatient attendance for paediatric ophthalmology was 58 days, and the mean average waiting time was 97 days.

■ Pregnancy: Mental Health Services

Adam Thompson:

[\[15246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will make an assessment of the effectiveness of (a) maternal mental health services launched in 2019 and (b) maternal mental health services pregnancy and baby loss pathways in supporting bereaved mothers.

Karin Smyth:

A National Institute for Health and Care Research-funded study has been commissioned to examine the effectiveness and the implementation of maternal mental health services, including the services' provision of support for perinatal loss. The study will help identify the optimal service delivery models and context-specific barriers to implementation.

The research aims to understand how effective maternal mental health services are in improving mental health for women who have experienced trauma or loss related to childbirth, and the feasibility and effectiveness of maternal mental health services in providing trauma informed training across the maternity workforce.

To date, maternal mental health services have been implemented in 40 of the 42 integrated care system areas in England, and the last two are being supported by NHS England to ensure they are up and running as soon as possible.

We are committed to improving the mental health support available to those in the perinatal period. We know that the National Health Service has struggled to keep up

with people's greater awareness of the challenges of poor mental health, and that waiting lists for those referred for support are too high. We will reduce waiting times, intervene earlier, and increase the workforce as quickly as possible to meet the required needs.

■ Prostate Cancer: Blood Tests

Chris Coghlan:

[\[13065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of blood specimens taken for prostate specific antigen tests are separated within 16 hours.

Andrew Gwynne:

Prostate specific antigen (PSA) testing volumes and the time taken for blood specimens to reach the laboratory for separation, including those within 16 hours, is not currently monitored by NHS England.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advises that serum samples for PSA testing should be received by the laboratory within 16 hours. Pathology services are expected to implement this NICE recommendation.

All pathology services in England, including prostate specific antigen tests, are also expected to maintain international standards for laboratory quality, certified through UK Accreditation Service (UKAS).

■ Prostate Cancer: Screening

Chris Coghlan:

[\[13066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to ensure blood specimens taken for prostate specific antigen tests are separated within 16 hours.

Andrew Gwynne:

Prostate specific antigen (PSA) testing volumes and the time taken for blood specimens to reach the laboratory for separation, including those within 16 hours, is not currently monitored by NHS England.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advises that serum samples for PSA testing should be received by the laboratory within 16 hours. Pathology services are expected to implement this NICE recommendation.

All pathology services in England, including prostate specific antigen tests, are also expected to maintain international standards for laboratory quality, certified through UK Accreditation Service (UKAS).

■ Public Health: Finance

Dr Danny Chambers:

[12179]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of the total health and social care budget was allocated to the public health grant in each of the last five years.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 5 November 2024]: The proportion of the Department of Health and Social Care budget allocated to the local authority Public Health Grant over the last 5 years is shown in the table:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total PH Grant quantum (£m) (i)	3,134	3,279	3,324	3,417	3,530	3,603
Total DHSC Budget (£m) (ii)	134,184	181,441	183,548	177,095	182,634	187,636
% of DHSC Budget that is the PH grant	2.34%	1.81%	1.81%	1.93%	1.93%	1.92%

(i) the Public Health Grant includes the notional amounts for the 10 Greater Manchester Local Authorities who are part of a business rates retention scheme and no longer receive a public health grant; and (ii) the DHSC budget for 2024/25 is the planned budget as set out in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/public-expenditure-statistical-analyses-2024>

Mr Clive Betts:

[12385]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, what extra funding he plans to provide for public health.

Andrew Gwynne:

We will confirm 2025/26 local authority public health funding at the earliest opportunity, and will confirm future years' funding following the upcoming Spending Review next spring.

The Autumn Budget sets out the Government's commitment to strengthen the United Kingdom's pandemic preparedness and health protection with £460 million of investment.

HOME OFFICE**■ Anti-social Behaviour: Hertfordshire****David Taylor:**[\[16110\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help tackle antisocial behaviour in Hertfordshire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

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

That's why this Government will put thousands of new neighbourhood police and community support officers into local communities across the country, so residents know they will have someone to turn to when things go wrong.

We will crack down on those causing havoc on our high streets by introducing tougher powers, including new Respect Orders to tackle repeat offending, and we will give the police stronger powers to crack down on the antisocial use of dangerous and deafening off-road bikes.

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Public Spaces Protection Orders**Richard Tice:**[\[14215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of Public Space Protection Orders in reducing antisocial behaviours; and what the evidential basis of that assessment is.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 provides the police, local authorities and other local agencies with a range of tools and powers, including Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO) that they can use to respond to anti-social behaviour.

In November 2023, the Home Office published a report on GOV.UK which looked at police perceptions of powers within the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, which can be found on the GOV.UK website.

It is for local authorities to decide how best to effectively implement PSPOs depending on the specific circumstances. They are best placed to understand what is driving the behaviour in question, the impact that it is having, and to determine the most appropriate response.

The Government recently announced Respect Orders, which will be introduced in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill. Respect Orders can be applied for by police and local councils and are issued by the courts. They will enable courts to place wide-ranging restrictions on the behaviour of the most persistent and disruptive ASB offenders. They will include a power of arrest for any suspected breach, meaning officers can take action quickly to disrupt ongoing ASB. Breach will be a criminal offence, which is heard in the criminal courts with a wide range of sentencing options,

including community orders, unlimited fines and, for the most severe cases, up to two years' imprisonment.

■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes

Leigh Ingham: [\[15152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of funding for domestic violence services in the next financial year.

Jess Phillips:

This Government is committed to supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

We understand the importance of specialist support services and their critical role in providing tailored support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse to help them recover and move forward with their lives.

Following the Spending Review announcements in October, the Home Office is now deciding how the total funding settlement is allocated across the department to deliver the Government's priorities. We will provide more information in due course.

■ Essex Police: Standards

James McMurdock: [\[15374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services entitled PEEL 2021/22 – An inspection of Essex Police, published on 14 October 2022, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the performance of Essex Police.

James McMurdock: [\[15375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services entitled PEEL 2021/22 – An inspection of Essex Police, published on 14 October 2022, what steps her Department plans to take to help improve Essex constabulary's response time to calls from the public.

Dame Diana Johnson:

It is the responsibility of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to assess the operational performance of forces in England and Wales. We work closely with the Inspectorate to monitor individual forces' performance.

Roger Hirst, as the directly elected Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) for Essex, is responsible for holding the Chief Constable to account for the performance of Essex Police.

To drive up performance and standards across forces, ensuring communities can have confidence in their local police force, the Home Secretary announced on 19 November that she intends to create a new Performance Unit in the Home Office. This will harness national data to monitor performance and direct improvements,

building on the existing work of the College of Policing, HMICFRS, National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and PCCs.

■ Home Office: British Overseas Territories

Alicia Kearns:

[\[15479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, which Minister in her Department is responsible for relations with the Overseas Territories.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Lord Hanson of Flint is the Home Office minister responsible for relations with Overseas Territories.

■ Lord Walney

Carla Denyer:

[\[15141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish details of meetings (a) held by the Government's independent adviser on political violence and disruption since he was appointed to that role and (b) that he plans to hold in the next 12 months.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office has no current plans to publish details of meetings held by the independent adviser on political violence and disruption.

■ Offenders: Sexual Offences

Ian Lavery:

[\[15430\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many registered sex offenders have no fixed accommodation.

Jess Phillips:

Qualifying offenders (i.e., those convicted for an offence in Schedule 3 to the Sexual Offences Act 2003) are required to notify personal details to the police. This system is often referred to as the 'sex offenders' register' and requires offenders to provide specified details annually and whenever those details change. Registered sex offenders with no fixed abode are required to notify their details every seven days.

The information provided to the police, and other relevant information, is stored on the ViSOR database which allows for the recording and sharing of information relevant to an offender's risk between the police and other relevant agencies. The Ministry of Justice publishes annual statistics about (the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs)). The most recent statistics were published on 31 October and showed that on 31 March 2024, 70,052 sex offenders were managed under MAPPAs. Those statistics relate to MAPPAs as a system: the volumes of offenders managed at the three different risk levels, or the volumes of risk management tools (such as sexual harm prevention orders) made by a court in the

reporting year. There are no plans to include information about offenders with no fixed abode in this publication.

■ **Police: British Overseas Territories**

Alicia Kearns: [\[15475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many UK police are deployed in each Overseas Territory.

Alicia Kearns: [\[15477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many UK police were deployed in each Overseas Territory in November 2023.

Dame Diana Johnson:

UK Policing is operationally independent and continues to support the development of policing capabilities across the Overseas Territories.

In November 2024, authorisations were provided for the deployment of three police officers to Bermuda, two to the Falkland Islands, one to Anguilla, one to Gibraltar and seven to the Sovereign Base Areas.

■ **Police: Recruitment**

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[15876\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) warranted police officers, (b) Police Community Support Officers and (c) special constables have been recruited since February 2023.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office collects and publishes data annually on the number of police workers joining the police service 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 on the number of Police Officers, Police Community Support Officers and Special Constables joining the police service between the years ending 31 March 2007 to 2024 can be found in the 'Joiners Open Data Table' here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/669a9161fc8e12ac3edb0081/open-data-table-police-workforce-joiners-240724.ods>.

Information for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 is due to be published in Summer 2025.

■ **Refugees: Ukraine**

Tim Farron: [\[15418\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 10416 on Refugees, if she will make an assessment of the

potential merits of allowing Ukrainian nationals who are temporarily living in the UK to bring over a spouse or minor children.

Seema Malhotra:

Since the launch of our Ukraine schemes, the UK has offered or extended sanctuary to nearly 300,000 Ukrainians.

The UK's support for Ukraine remains steadfast and, together with our partners and allies, the UK stands in solidarity with Ukraine and condemns the Russian Government's unprovoked and premeditated war against Ukraine.

The Homes for Ukraine Scheme remains open and available to new applications. These applications must be sponsored by someone who is British, Irish or settled.

Our Ukraine schemes are kept under continual review as we look to provide stability for those we have welcomed to the UK and those who still need our sanctuary.

■ **Visas: Digital Technology**

Abtisam Mohamed:

[15623]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support people with the roll-out of e-Visas.

Abtisam Mohamed:

[15624]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to issue any physical documents as part of the rollout of e-Visas.

Seema Malhotra:

We have taken a number of steps to support people with the rollout and transition to eVisas.

We are running targeted communications to raise awareness of the decommissioning of physical immigration documents and our move to eVisas, and to encourage people to create a UKVI account and access their eVisa. This includes developing various communications materials, informative videos, guidance available at www.gov.uk/evisa, and engagement with stakeholders.

Support is available through the eVisa grant funded network of organisations for vulnerable holders of physical immigration documents who require support in making the transition to eVisa. There are a number of national grant funded bodies and community-based organisations spread across the UK, which offer immediate, free support for vulnerable people in their transition to an eVisa throughout the rest of 2024, and beyond. Details of support available, including the list of organisations is available on GOV.UK at: [eVisa: community support for vulnerable people - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/evisa-community-support).

Our Assisted Digital service is available in the UK to provide individual support by phone, email and in-person to those with low/no digital skills or access, or who require assistance with IT-related aspects of creating a UKVI account.

People can also contact the UKVI Resolution Centre, which provides support via email and webchat to those creating their UKVI account, and telephone support to those using the online immigration status services.

Where a person is unable to manage their own affairs due to, for example, age or disability, a 'proxy', who is authorised, can create and manage the account on behalf of the person.

People can also nominate a 'helper' and give them limited access to their account, so that they can assist with creating a UKVI account, completing details to access an eVisa, and with any immigration application.

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.

We are taking further steps to reduce the number of circumstances where people need to provide evidence of their immigration status, by developing services to make the relevant immigration status information available automatically through system to system checks with other government departments and the NHS, removing the need for people to prove their status themselves.

We have enabled transport operators including airlines, ferries, and international trains to securely and automatically access the immigration status of passengers travelling on their services when they present their passport which is linked to their eVisa for a more convenient journey. We have also established a 24/7 Carrier Support Hub in case a carrier does not receive confirmation of the passenger's immigration status.

A partner pack of readily shareable content, including factsheets and social media content, has been developed and shared with other government departments and third-party support networks which they can use to disseminate eVisa information to people with whom they engage. We have also issued press notices about the transition to eVisas, and delivered detailed media briefings with UK and International media outlets.

The Home Office is moving to a digital immigration system, and there are no plans to issue physical documents in future.

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

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Community Ownership Fund

Steve Witherden:

[\[15403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to provide an update on the status of Drenewydd Actif Newtown's application for the Community Ownership Fund.

Alex Norris:

Applicants to the Community Ownership Fund (COF) were required to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form as a first stage and have this approved before being able to submit a full application in the next available round of the Fund.

Drenewydd Actif received an outcome regarding their EOI on 11 April 2024 after the last round of funding had closed.

Communities will rightly be seeking clarity regarding the future of the Community Ownership Fund. We recognise uncertainty is challenging for groups seeking to save vital community assets; the Government is carefully considering all available options and will confirm plans in due course.

■ Council Tax: Debt Collection

Natalie Fleet:

[\[15492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people have had bailiff fees added to council tax arrears in each of the last three years for which data is available in (a) Bolsover, (b) Derbyshire and (c) England; and what the average cost of those fees was.

Jim McMahon:

The Government does not collect data on the number of people who have had bailiff fees added to council tax arrears for any year or region or on the average cost of bailiff fees.

■ Council Tax: Greater London

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[15204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to allow for an above-inflation rise in the council tax referendum threshold for 2025-26 for the Greater London Authority to increase revenue for Transport for London.

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.

■ Embassies: China**Sir Iain Duncan Smith:** [\[15717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had discussions with the Metropolitan Police on the called-in application for the proposed new Chinese embassy in Tower Hamlets.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15804\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether (a) she and (b) Ministers in her Department have had meetings with representatives of the Chinese government since 4 July 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations are published on gov.uk as part of the government's transparency agenda.

An independent Planning Inspector will hold a public inquiry at which interested parties will be able to put forward evidence and representations. These will be taken into account when a final decision is made.

Following the inquiry, the Inspector's report and recommendation will be sent to MHCLG, and Planning Ministers will then reach a decision on whether to grant planning permission.

■ Falkland Islands and Gibraltar**Adam Jogee:** [\[9314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of allowing the people of Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands to elect Members to sit in the House of Commons.

Rushanara Ali:

The Government has made no assessment on allowing people of Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands to elect Members to sit in the House of Commons.

■ Freeports: Ynys Mon**Llinos Medi:** [\[15853\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent progress her Department has made on reviewing the outline business case for Anglesey Freeport; and whether she plans to make a decision on this in 2024.

Alex Norris:

Officials have been working with the Freeport and with the Welsh Government to take forward the Freeport's business case and we will be in a position to provide further updates shortly.

■ Housing: Construction

Mike Amesbury:

[15810]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of consumer protections for new build flats and houses.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Government believes the mechanisms of redress for those buying new homes are inadequate. We are therefore working with the devolved governments to implement the statutory UK-wide New Homes Ombudsman (NHO) to investigate and resolve complaints, and will bring forward secondary legislation in due course.

■ Housing: Solar Power

Ellie Chowns:

[9860]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make it her policy to require all newbuild homes to include solar photovoltaic panels.

Alex Norris:

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

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Buildings

Sir Ashley Fox:

[9071]

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

Alex Norris:

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

■ Pedestrian Areas: Catering**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[15450\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many premises applied for a pavement licence under the Business and Planning Act 2020.

Alex Norris:

The department does not collect data on the number of pavement licences applied for. It is up to local authorities to determine pavement licencing applications.

■ Private Rented Housing: Evictions**Natalie Fleet:** [\[15494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people have been evicted due to section 21 notices in each of the last three years for which data is available in (a) Bolsover constituency and (b) Derbyshire.

Matthew Pennycook:

Figures relating to Section 21 eviction proceedings in individual constituencies in England are not held by the department, but we know that chronic insecurity in the private rented sector in Derbyshire has real-life consequences for individuals and families. Tenants across England will benefit from the measures in the forthcoming Renters' Rights Bill, including the abolition of Section 21 evictions.

JUSTICE**■ Euthanasia****Helen Grant:** [\[14961\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the capacity of the High Court (Family Division) to undertake reviews of all required cases under the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill is not Government legislation. If the Bill were to progress, the Government may well assess the policy and its impacts. Should the Bill become law, the appropriate arrangements will be made to ensure the Government is able to fulfil its legal duties.

■ Television Licences: Non-payment**Natalie Fleet:** [\[15493\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people have been prosecuted for non-payment of a television licence in each of the last three years for which data is available in Bolsover constituency; and what form that prosecution took.

Heidi Alexander:

The Ministry of Justice publishes data on the number of prosecutions at magistrates' courts in England and Wales for non-payment of a television licence, in the Outcomes by Offence data tool. This includes breakdowns by police force area. The data tool can be downloaded from the Criminal Justice Statistics landing page here: [Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: June 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

Published data includes the police force area of prosecutions, but it is not possible to separately identify Bolsover constituency as this information is not available in the Court Proceedings Database held by the Ministry of Justice.

NORTHERN IRELAND■ **Voting Rights****Sorcha Eastwood:**[\[15367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing residence-based voting rights in Northern Ireland.

Hilary Benn:

The Government has no plans to revise the franchise for any elections based on residency. The right to vote at Parliamentary elections is consistent across the UK and it is important that all MPs are elected on a consistent franchise.

In order to register to vote at Assembly and local elections in Northern Ireland those who are eligible must be resident in the constituency in which they wish to vote.

SCOTLAND■ **High Rise Flats: Scotland****Harriet Cross:**[\[15971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on (a) the use of the Barnett consequential funding provided in the 2021-22 financial year for cladding remediation, (b) the identification of buildings requiring cladding remediation work in Scotland and (c) whether additional funding will be made available through future Barnett consequentials for this purpose.

Kirsty McNeill:

The identification of buildings requiring cladding remediation work in Scotland is a devolved matter, and the Scottish Government has recently introduced its own Cladding Remediation Programme for Scotland.

How the Scottish Government chooses to use its block grant funding, and any additional funding arising from Barnett consequentials is a matter for the Scottish Government.

In the recent Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Scottish Government will be provided with a £47.7 billion settlement in 2025/26 – the largest in real terms in the history of devolution. This includes a £3.4 billion top-up through the Barnett formula, with £2.8 billion for day-to-day spending and £610 million for capital investment.

■ Offshore Industry: Training

Harriet Cross:

[\[16099\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions she has had with the Scottish Government on regional-specific skills development funds for workers transitioning from the oil and gas industry.

Kirsty McNeill:

Scotland's world class offshore oil and gas workers should be at the forefront of the race to clean power.

The UK Government is partnering with the Scottish Government to deliver a skills passport for oil and gas workers as part of the clean energy transition in Scotland. This will be delivered in collaboration with key industry stakeholders, including Offshore Energies UK, Renewable UK, OPITO, Global Wind Organisation (GWO).

Research from Offshore Energies UK shows that 90% of oil and gas workers have transferable skills for offshore renewable jobs. The development of this passport will help workers utilise their skills to play a vital role in the transition from carbon-intensive industries to clean energy sectors for workers across all regions of Scotland.

■ Renewable Energy: Employment

Harriet Cross:

[\[16098\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what steps his Department is taking to help North Sea workers to transition to green economy jobs in Scotland.

Kirsty McNeill:

Scotland's world class offshore oil and gas workers should be at the forefront of the race to clean power.

The UK Government is partnering with the Scottish Government, Offshore Energies UK, Renewable UK, OPITO, Global Wind Organisation (GWO) and other key industry stakeholders to deliver a skills passport for the clean energy transition in Scotland. This will help workers transition from carbon-intensive industries to clean energy sectors.

Our goal to become a clean energy superpower will create hundreds of thousands of new jobs, many of which I am pleased to say will be based in Scotland. With GB Energy also headquartered in Aberdeen, Scotland and the Northeast will be at the heart of the UK energy sector.

■ Renewable Energy: Scotland

Harriet Cross:

[\[16097\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether her Department is taking steps to increase the level of research and development funding offshore green energy projects in Scotland.

Kirsty McNeill:

To achieve the UK Government's Mission of becoming a clean energy superpower by 2030, the UK Government is establishing Great British Energy, an operationally independent company investing in and driving projects forward across all parts of the UK. The UK government will capitalise Great British Energy with £8.3 billion of new money across this Parliament, with Scotland well-placed to benefit in terms of investment and the creation of high-quality jobs. This comes in addition to the record-breaking Contracts for Difference Allocation Round 6, which has committed £1.555 billion for investment in clean energy projects, including numerous offshore wind projects.

In her recent budget, the Chancellor announced a highest-ever £20.4bn investment in UK R&D to drive economic growth, and our clean energy and other missions.

TRANSPORT

■ Driving Licences: Young People

Dr Scott Arthur:

[\[16005\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing Graduated Driving Licences for young people.

Lilian Greenwood:

Whilst we are not considering Graduated Driving Licences, we absolutely recognise that young people are disproportionately victims of tragic incidents on our roads, and we are considering other measures to tackle this problem and protect young drivers.

■ Gatwick Airport: Noise

Mike Martin:

[\[15348\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of night-time flight noise on the health of residents living in Gatwick airport's flight path.

Mike Kane:

The Government sets noise-related restrictions at Gatwick, including a limit on the number of night flights. The noise impacts of the airport are assessed annually.

The Department for Transport has commissioned the Aviation Night Noise Effects study to explore how annoyance and sleep disturbance impacts vary at different times of the night. The final results are expected to be published in Autumn 2026.

Mike Martin: [\[15350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with the Civil Aviation Authority on steps to ensure that airspace modernisation around Gatwick airport leads to a reduction in noise levels for residents.

Mike Kane:

The department has regular engagement with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to monitor the effective delivery of airspace modernisation and drive forward the environmental benefits of the programme.

In its role as independent regulator, the CAA ensures that all airspace change proposals (ACPs) adhere to the CAP1616 process. CAP1616 sets out how sponsors of airspace change, such as Gatwick Airport, must consider the impacts of noise on the local communities, ensuring sufficient consultation takes place with those potentially affected.

■ High Speed 2 Line: Rolling Stock

Laurence Turner: [\[15996\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her Department's timetable is for the delivery of rolling stock for Phase 1 of HS2.

Lilian Greenwood:

The rolling stock programme for Phase 1 of HS2 will support the target delivery-into-service of Birmingham Curzon Street to London Old Oak Common of 2029 to 2033.

■ Network Rail

Laurence Turner: [\[15994\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to page 4 of the minutes of the meeting of Network Rail's Board held on 4 July 2024, whether the updated efficiency plan will be published.

Simon Lightwood:

The Control Period 7 (CP7) Delivery Plans for each of the regions and functions set out efficiency plans and targets. Part of Network Rail's annual Business Plan update includes updated plans and trajectories for regions and functions. The next CP7 Business Plan update is scheduled for publication at the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

The 23/24 efficiency performance has been reported by the Office of Rail and Road and is available on its website: [Annual efficiency and finance assessment of Network Rail 2024 | Office of Rail and Road](#).

■ Road Traffic Control: Complaints

Laurence Turner: [\[15992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2024 to Question 14413 on Road Traffic Control: Complaints, how many objections were

made to Traffic Regulation Orders in (a) Birmingham, (b) the West Midlands and (c) England in each of the last five years.

Lilian Greenwood:

Whilst the Department holds information on Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders, there would be a disproportionate cost to provide this information for the timeframes and the areas requested within the deadline set for answering this question.

■ **Road Traffic Control: Public Consultation**

Laurence Turner:

[\[15993\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Traffic regulation orders: changes to publishing requirements and special events order approvals, which closed on 17 April 2022, whether she plans to publish part 2 of the response to that consultation.

Lilian Greenwood:

We hope to announce our response to changes to the process for making special event orders in due course. We will consider our response to the remaining changes proposed by the previous Government as soon as possible.

■ **Transport: Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

Alex Mayer:

[\[15315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Prime Minister's National Statement at COP29 on 12 November 2024, whether she plans to revise her Department's emission target following the Government's announcement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% on 1990 levels by 2035.

Lilian Greenwood:

The UK's ambitious and credible Nationally Determined Contribution target for 2035 is consistent with the effort required to deliver the existing Sixth Carbon Budget (2033-37). The Department is committed to delivering greener transport and supporting accelerating to net zero as part of the Government's mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ **Office for Equality and Opportunity: Staff**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[14905\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, how many full time equivalent staff are employed by the Office for Equality and Opportunity.

Anneliese Dodds:

Overall staff figures for the Office for Equality and Opportunity total 133.8 Full Time Equivalents, of which the Race Equality Unit total 6 FTE, the Disability Unit total 19.8

FTE and the Women and Equalities Unit total 36.5 FTE. This excludes any temporary time limited resource from wider Cabinet Office.

■ STEM Subjects: Employment

Jim Shannon:

[\[14935\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to encourage equal (a) pay and (b) opportunity in STEM jobs.

Anneliese Dodds:

We are committed to strengthening equal pay and ending pay discrimination. The plan to 'Make Work Pay' will transform the lives of working women, including by strengthening rights to equal pay and providing protections from maternity and menopause discrimination and sexual harassment.

With regard to STEM opportunities, we will continue to support learners who wish to have a career in STEM through our technical education offer with a range of high quality qualifications and apprenticeship opportunities at all levels. We have also looked specifically at support for those returning to the sector after a break for caring, and will feed this learning into wider work on breaking down barriers for women in the workplace.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Access to Work Programme

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[15579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to tackle delays in the Access to Work scheme.

Alison McGovern:

We are committed to reducing wait times for Access to Work, and we have deployed additional staff to process claims and streamlined our delivery processes. We prioritise customers starting a job in four weeks.

Access to Work continues to be in high demand and we recognise that further work is needed to ensure that it is providing a timely and effective service for customers.

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[15580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will increase funding for the Access to Work scheme.

Alison McGovern:

Spending on Access to Work was around £257.8m in 2023/24, a real-terms increase of 33% compared to 2022/23, and it has increased every year since 2021/22. The Department is working through how to allocate its funding settlement from the 2024 Spending Review for 2025/26. At the Spending Review next year, funding for years beyond that will be agreed.

To support more disabled people and those with health conditions to enter and stay in work, as part of the Get Britain Working plans, the Government is launching Keep Britain Working. This is an independent review into the role of UK employers in reducing health-related inactivity and to promote healthy and inclusive workplaces.

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[15719\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 14442 on Access to Work Programme, what measurements her Department takes of the time scales for processing applications to monitor whether targets are being met.

Alison McGovern:

The Department for Work and Pensions uses internal management information on finalised applications to oversee performance against our aspiration to process applications in 25 days.

The Access to Work scheme continues to be in high demand, and we are considering options for how to improve waiting times for customers.

■ **Birds of Prey: Rodenticides**

Chris Hinchliff:

[\[15550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of Wild Justice's report entitled Collateral Damage: The Rodenticide Stewardship Scheme - is it working?, published in November 2024.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Rodenticides Stewardship Scheme was developed by The Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use UK to promote responsible use and is overseen by the Government Oversight Group for Rodenticide Stewardship (GOG), chaired by the Health and Safety Executive. The GOG is conducting a review of rodenticide stewardship, under which it will consider all appropriate evidence. The detailed work of this review is expected to be completed in 2025.

■ **Child Poverty Taskforce**

Steve Darling:

[\[15291\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including financial inclusion in the terms of reference of the Child Poverty Taskforce.

Alison McGovern:

'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing our Policy' describes the Government's approach to developing the Child Poverty Strategy. This sets out how increasing financial resilience for low-income families is one of the four key themes where the Child Poverty Taskforce is working to develop policies to reduce child poverty.

The Taskforce is working with a range of stakeholders, including financial institutions, charities, and consumer representatives to find solutions to problem debt and enable families to build savings.

■ Cold Weather Payments

Siân Berry:

[\[16025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many households (a) are eligible and (b) have received Cold Weather Payments in 2024, broken down by week.

Emma Reynolds:

(a) Table 1 shows the number of estimated eligible qualifiers across 2024.

Table 1: Number of Estimated Eligible Recipients in England and Wales

SEASON (1 ST NOVEMBER-31 ST MARCH)	ESTIMATED ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS (ENGLAND AND WALES)
2023/24	3,921,000
2024/25	4,116,000

Due to the nature of eligibility, we are unable to breakdown to the household level.

(b) Tables 2 and 3 show the breakdown of weekly payments made in 2024- these are from the 2023/24 season running from the 1st November 2023-31st March 2024 and the start of the 2024/25 season 1st -22nd November 2024.

Table 2: Payments made to estimated qualifiers in England and Wales, 2024- from the 2023/24 season.

WEEK COMMENCING	TRIGGERS	ESTIMATED PAYMENTS MADE (ENGLAND AND WALES)
29 December 2023	0	0
5 January 2024	0	0
12 January 2024	3	11,000
19 January 2024	9	362,000
26 January 2024	5	204,000
2 February 2024	0	0
9 February 2024	0	0
16 February 2024	0	0
23 February 2024	0	0

WEEK COMMENCING	TRIGGERS	ESTIMATED PAYMENTS MADE (ENGLAND AND WALES)
1 March 2024	0	0
8 March 2024	0	0
15 March 2024	0	0
22 March 2024	0	0
29 March 2024	0	0
5 April 2024	0	0

Table 3: Payments made to Estimated Qualifiers in England and Wales so Far from the 2024/25 season.

WEEK COMMENCING	TRIGGERS	ESTIMATED PAYMENTS MADE (ENGLAND AND WALES)
1 November 2024	0	0
8 November 2024	0	0
15 November 2024	0	0
22 November 2024	3	6000

Please note-

1) Figures are estimated based on the number of individuals eligible at the start of the season. See the methodology document for further details,

and guidance on how to estimate the number of payments and expenditure, here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cold-weather-payment-estimates-2023-to-2024/background-and-methodology-cold-weather-payment-estimates-2023-to-2024>

2) Figures are shown by the week or month the payment was triggered - that is, the day that the recorded/forecasted temperatures for the seven

day period caused payments to be authorised. The recipient should receive the payment within 14 days.

3) All volumes are rounded to the nearest 1,000

4) The figures include claimants meeting the legacy benefit and Universal Credit eligibility criteria for Cold Weather Payments.

Future publications for the 2024-25 Cold Weather Season can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cold-weather-payment-estimates-2024-to-2025>

■ Pension Credit

Mike Amesbury:

[15808]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the uptake of Pension Credit since the Winter Fuel Allowance reforms became live (a) nationally, (b) in the North West and (c) in Runcorn and Helsby constituency.

Emma Reynolds:

The latest available take-up estimates for Income-related benefits is available on Gov.uk: [Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up - GOV.UK](#) and covers the financial year 2022/2023.

Data on how many Pension Credit applications made between 1 April 2024 and 22 September 2024 was recently published on gov.uk, [Weekly Pension Credit claims received from 1 April 2024 to 22 September 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

On 28 October 2024, The Department [announced](#) updated Pension Credit applications and award statistics will be published on 28 November 2024. This publication will provide application volumes up to 17 November 2024.

Please note, we do not currently hold this information at Regional or Constituency level.

■ Pensioners: Poverty

Rupert Lowe:

[15365]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the number of pensioners per constituency in (a) relative and (b) absolute poverty.

Emma Reynolds:

Statistics on the number of pensioners living in relative and absolute poverty are not available at a constituency level.

Statistics on the number of pensioners living in relative and absolute poverty at regional level are published annually in the Households Below Average Income statistics [Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

■ Pensioners: Social Security Benefits

Jim Shannon:

[14934]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking with the devolved Administrations to help increase awareness among pensioners of benefits they may be entitled to.

Emma Reynolds:

This Government remains completely committed to supporting pensioners and giving them the dignity and security they deserve in retirement.

DWP uses a wide range of channels including information on Gov.uk, in letters, leaflets and via telephone to communicate information to older people about pensioner benefits, including how to claim, and signposts to devolved provision where appropriate. Where there is devolved provision for pensioner support, the Devolved Governments provide their own information and communications.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Children**

Natalie Fleet:[\[15489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many families in Bolsover constituency have been affected by the two-child benefit cap in each year since 2017.

Sir Stephen Timms:

AFFECTED UNIVERSAL CREDIT HOUSEHOLDS
(REPORTING A THIRD OR SUBSEQUENT CHILD
BORN ON OR AFTER 6 APRIL 2017) IN BOLSOVER
CONSTITUENCY, BY YEAR

Year	Number of UC households
April 2018	-
April 2019	40
April 2020	160
April 2021	280
April 2022	420
April 2023	530
April 2024	660

Notes:

Base: Universal Credit households that had an assessment period that ended in April of each year.

Data for April 2024 is latest available, in line with the most recent published data on this policy.

DWP does not hold data on CTC households affected by the two-child limit.

Figures rounded to two significant figures (to a minimum of 10), and values less than 10 are suppressed in line with disclosure rules.

The difference between these figures and published statistics for Bolsover constituency is because the published stats are for those that do not receive some amount of child element due to the policy, whereas these figures include households that have an exception for all children affected by the policy.

Natalie Fleet:

[\[15490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many women in (a) Bolsover constituency, (b) Derbyshire and (c) England have a rape clause exemption from the two-child benefit cap.

Sir Stephen Timms:

(a) In Bolsover constituency, fewer than 10 households had a Non-Consensual Conception exception to the policy in April 2024.

(b) In Derbyshire, 50 households had a Non-Consensual Conception exception to the policy in April 2024.

(c) In England, 2,300 households had a Non-Consensual Conception exception to the policy in April 2024.

Notes:

Base: Universal Credit households that had an assessment period that ended in April 2024.

Data for April 2024 is latest available, in line with the most recent published data on this policy.

DWP does not hold data on CTC households affected by the two-child limit.

Figures rounded to two significant figures (to a minimum of 10), and values less than 10 are suppressed in line with disclosure rules.

Derbyshire area in (b) calculated as the sum of the following Local Authorities: Amber Valley, Bolsover, Chesterfield, Erewash, Derby, Derbyshire Dales, High Peak, North East Derbyshire, South Derbyshire

■ Winter Fuel Payment: Terminal Illnesses

Richard Foord:

[\[15290\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of making people with less than 12 months to live to automatically eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment.

Emma Reynolds:

This Government remains completely committed to supporting pensioners and giving them the dignity and security they deserve in retirement.

Linking Winter Fuel eligibility to Pension Credit and other means tested benefits for pensioners, ensures the least well-off pensioners still receive the help they need; this includes people with a terminal illness who are eligible. There are no plans to change the eligibility criteria.

To ensure that Winter Fuel Payments are received by those on the lowest incomes, the Government is determined to do everything it can to maximise take-up of Pension Credit which provides a safety net for the pensioners on the lowest incomes and opens the door to other benefits including the Winter Fuel Payment.

For disabled pensioners or those with long-term health conditions, the “extra costs” disability benefits, including those provided for by the Scottish Government, provide a tax free, non-income-related contribution towards the extra costs people with a long-term health condition can face, such as additional heating costs. They are paid in addition to any other benefits received.

The Department supports people nearing the end of life through the Special Rules for End of Life (SREL). These enable people who are nearing the end of their lives to get faster, easier access to certain benefits, without needing to attend a medical assessment and without serving waiting periods – and, in most cases, they receive the highest rate of benefit. For many years, the Special Rules have applied to people who have 6 months or less to live and have now been changed so they apply to people who have 12 months or less to live.

■ Workplace Pensions

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[13981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals on extending the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Act 2023 to (a) include auto-enrolment for employees aged 18 and above, (b) enable pension contributions to be applied from the first £1 of pay and (c) increase employer contribution rates for auto-enrolment.

Emma Reynolds:

Security in retirement is a key priority for this Government.

AE has seen over 11.1 million people automatically enrolled into a workplace pension to date and more than 2.4 million employers have complied with their legal duties.

This has helped to deliver an additional £43 billion being saved into pensions in 2023 compared to 2012 (in 2023 earnings terms) for eligible individuals.

We will consider if and when to make changes to AE, balancing the need for improved pension outcomes with the effects on businesses

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Upgraded Free Trade Agreement with the Republic of Korea: Round Three Negotiations

Minister of State for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander):
[\[HCWS258\]](#)

The third round of negotiations on an upgraded Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Republic of Korea (RoK) took place in Seoul between 5 and 14 November 2024.

The talks were the UK's first with the RoK since the Secretary of State for Business and Trade announced the government's intention to deliver the UK's FTA negotiations programme in July.

Economic growth is our first mission in Government and FTAs have an important role to play in achieving this. An upgraded FTA with the RoK will contribute to growth, jobs and prosperity in the UK, and provide long-term certainty to UK businesses. Improvements to the existing agreement will include a comprehensive chapter on digital trade, simplified rules of origin and a range of additional commitments that capture advancements in trade policy beyond our existing terms. Total trade between the UK and RoK was worth £17billion in the four quarters to the end of Q2 2024. An upgraded FTA is intended to support further growth in this trade.

Negotiators made good progress on a number of areas, including but not limited to:

Digital trade

Constructive discussions were held to build on the existing agreement's limited digital provisions. Discussions during the round covered a range of areas, including data, trade digitalisation, and cooperation on emerging technologies.

Rules of Origin

Good progress was achieved towards securing a new Rules of Origin chapter that supports current and future supply chains. Discussions covered the chapter's general provisions and origin procedures text, as well as Product Specific Rules.

Services and Business Mobility

Productive discussions were held across a range of areas including domestic regulation, financial services, business mobility and professional and business services. The UK is seeking commitments to open up new opportunities for services trade.

Customs and Trade Facilitation

Good progress was made, with sides agreeing a large part of the chapter. These commitments will make customs processes more predictable and facilitative.

Good Regulatory Practice

Negotiators made significant progress towards agreeing the RoK's first Good Regulatory Practice chapter, which will support companies to operate in a more transparent and predictable regulatory environment.

Other Areas

Positive discussions were held across a range of areas of the FTA including Supply Chains, Trade and Gender Equality, and Anti-Corruption.

The Government will only ever sign a trade agreement which aligns with the UK's national interests, upholding our high standards across a range of sectors, including protections for the National Health Service.

The fourth round of negotiations is expected to take place in London in the Spring of 2025. The Government will continue to work towards delivering outcomes in the FTA that secure economic growth for the UK and will update Parliament on the progress of discussions with the RoK as they continue to develop.

CABINET OFFICE

■ UK COVID-19 Inquiry response costs for Quarter 2 24/25

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden):

[\[HCWS259\]](#)

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted each and every person in the UK. The work of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry is crucial in examining the UK's response to and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. There are evidently lessons to be learnt from the pandemic and the government is committed to closely considering the Covid-19 Inquiry's findings and recommendations, which will play a key role in informing the government's planning and preparations for the future.

The Government recognises the unprecedented and wholly exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, and the importance of examining as rigorously as possible the actions the state took in response, in order to learn lessons for the future. The Inquiry is therefore unprecedented in its scope, complexity and profile, looking at recent events that have profoundly impacted everyone's lives.

The independent UK COVID-19 Inquiry publishes its own running costs quarterly. Following the publication of the Inquiry's Financial Report for Quarter 2 2024-25 on 24 October 2024, I would like to update colleagues on the costs to the UK Government associated with responding to the UK COVID-19 Inquiry.

Figures provided are based upon a selection of the most relevant departments and are not based on a complete set of departmental figures and are not precise for accounting purposes. Ensuring a comprehensive and timely response to the Inquiry requires significant input from a number of key government departments, including, but not limited to, the Cabinet Office, the Department for Health and Social Care, the UK Health Security Agency, the Home Office and HM Treasury, many of which are supported by the Government Legal Department. While every effort has been made to ensure a robust

methodology, complexities remain in trying to quantify the time and costs dedicated to the Inquiry alone.

It should be noted that alongside full time resource within departments, Inquiry response teams draw on expertise from across their organisations. The staff costs associated with appearing as witnesses, preparing witnesses and associated policy development work on the UK Covid Inquiry are not included in the costs below.

Breakdown of Staff & Costs

The government's response to the UK COVID-19 Inquiry is led by Inquiry Response Units across departments.

- Number of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff: 284 Full Time Equivalents
- Cost of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff: £5,303,000 (including contingent labour costs)
- Financial year 2024/25 (Q1 + Q2), total cost of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff: £10,352,000 (including contingent labour costs)

	QUARTER 1	QUARTER 2	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
Cost of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff (including contingent labour costs)	£5,049,000	£5,303,000	£10,352,000
Number of UK COVID-19 Inquiry Response Unit staff (Full Time Equivalents)	280	284	N/A

Total Inquiry Response Unit Legal Costs

Inquiry Response Units across government departments are supported by the Government Legal Department, co-partnering firms of solicitors, and legal counsel. These associated legal costs (excluding internal departmental advisory legal costs) for Q2 are below.

- Q2 legal costs: £5,818,000
- Financial year 2024/25 (Q1 + Q2), total legal costs: £10,054,000

	QUARTER 1	QUARTER 2	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
Total legal costs	£4,236,000	£5,818,000	£10,054,000

EDUCATION

■ School Funding: Provisional 2025-26 allocations

Minister of State, Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell):

[\[HCWS264\]](#)

Today we are confirming provisional funding allocations for 2025-26 through the schools, high needs and central school services national funding formulae (NFFs). Overall, core schools funding (including funding for both mainstream schools and high needs) is increasing by £2.3bn in 2025-26 compared to the previous year.

Within this £2.3bn, high needs funding is increasing by a further £1 billion in 2025-26 to help local authorities and schools with the increasing costs of supporting children and young people with SEND. The majority of this increase will be allocated through the high needs NFF. Through this formula, local authorities will receive at least a 7% increase per head of their population aged 2-18, compared to their 2024-25 allocations, with some authorities seeing gains of up to 10%.

The overall high needs funding increase of £1.0 billion includes over £90 million to increase the high needs element of the 2024-25 core schools budget grant (CSBG) to a full-year equivalent of over £230 million. This will be incorporated with the other teachers' pay and pensions grants into a single CSBG (totalling £480 million) for special schools and alternative provision in 2025-26.

Funding for mainstream schools through the schools NFF is increasing by 2.23% per pupil compared to 2024-25. This includes a 1.28% increase to ensure that the 2024 teachers and support staff pay awards continue to be fully funded at national level in 2025-26. The 2025-26 schools NFF includes funding for pay and pensions costs that was previously allocated outside of the NFF, but is now being rolled into the formula – the 2024 to 2025 Teachers' Pay Additional grant (TPAG), Teachers' Pension Employer Contribution grant (TPECG) and Core Schools Budget grant (CSBG). This ensures that this additional funding forms an ongoing part of schools' core budgets.

On top of this rolled-in funding, the core factor values in the schools NFF are rising, to increase the funding available to schools. Through the minimum per pupil funding levels, every primary school will attract at least £4,955 per pupil, and every secondary school at least £6,465 per pupil.

Central school services funding funds local authorities for the ongoing responsibilities they continue to have for all schools, and some historic commitments that local authorities face. The total provisional funding for ongoing responsibilities is £342 million in 2025-26, which includes £4 million for additional costs of copyright licences for schools.

Across the schools, high needs, and central services NFFs, we have kept the structure of the formulae largely unchanged from 2024-25. This is to minimise disruption for schools and local authorities due to the shorter than usual timescales for the 2025-26 funding cycle, given the timing of the general election. For 2026-27 and beyond, we will consider changes to various funding formulae, recognising the importance of a fair funding system that directs funding where it is needed .

Updated allocations of schools, high needs and central schools services funding for 2025-26 will be published to the usual timescale in December through the Dedicated Schools Grant allocations, taking account of the latest pupil data at that point.

HOME OFFICE

■ Counter-Terrorism Disruptive Powers Report 2023

The Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis):

[\[HCWS262\]](#)

I have today published the Counter-Terrorism Disruptive Powers Report 2023 (CP 1212). The report has been laid before Parliament and it will be available in the Vote Office and online on GOV.UK.

It is important that there is transparency in the use of our counter-terrorism tools. Publishing this report ensures that the public can access data and information on the range of powers used to combat terrorist threats to the United Kingdom, the extent of their use and the safeguards and oversight in place to ensure they are used properly.

■ Report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation on the operation of the Terrorism Acts in 2022 and HMG response

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper):

[\[HCWS261\]](#)

In accordance with section 36 of the Terrorism Act 2006, Jonathan Hall KC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, has prepared a report on the operation of the Terrorism Acts in 2022, which is being laid before the House today.

I am grateful to Mr Hall KC for his thorough report and have carefully considered the recommendations and observations included within. I am today also laying before the House the Government's response to the report (CP 1211). Copies of the report and the Government's response will be available in the Vote Office and will also be published on GOV.UK.

■ Review of Police Powers to Apply for Serious Crime Prevention Orders in Terrorism Cases

The Minister of State for Security (Dan Jarvis):

[\[HCWS260\]](#)

I have today published the Review of Police Powers to Apply for Serious Crime Prevention Orders in Terrorism Cases. The report has been laid before Parliament and it will be available in the Vote Office and online on GOV.UK.

This report is published and laid before Parliament to discharge the statutory duty under section 44 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2021.

■ Visa sponsorship

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Migration and Citizenship (Seema Malhotra): [\[HCWS263\]](#)

The Home Office is committed to minimising abuse of the visa and immigration system by unscrupulous employers. We are now setting out our first steps to deliver on our manifesto commitment to ban rogue employers from sponsoring overseas workers. We are setting out stronger controls to prevent employers who flout UK employment laws from sponsoring overseas workers, alongside going after those who show signs of non-compliance. No organisation is above the law or too big to fail.

For the first time, visa and employment laws will be brought into close alignment which will ensure those who come to work in the UK will have strong protections, especially in important areas of our economy such as Adult Social Care.

The government will deliver legislation for the flagship Fair Work Agency, ensuring fair and strong employment rights for all. Through this legislation, we will ensure that any business found guilty of serious employment law breaches, such as failing to comply with National Minimum Wage, will have robust action taken against them – up to and including having their visa sponsorship licences refused or revoked. Alongside this, we are strengthening powers to ensure the compliance of those on the register of licenced sponsors.

Over the last 2 years, there have been a growing number of allegations about sponsors seeking to charge workers for sponsoring them, particularly in the care sector. Where these charges are inappropriate, individuals can fall into work-related debt and experience a significant amount of harm. To combat this, we are now taking action to ensure that if a business wishes to recruit internationally, they will be required to pay for certificates of sponsorship, sponsor licences and the associated administration themselves. This will end the intolerable practice of recovering these costs from workers, which has led to the exploitation and unfair treatment of staff, particularly care workers who have been left in debt to their employers. These rules will apply to the Skilled Worker route first and will be in force by the end of the year. We intend to build on this in due course, widening it to other sponsored employment routes.

This government is also taking robust action against businesses that show signs of non-compliance such as committing minor visa rule breaches. Current rules impose Action Plans on businesses for only 3 months, but today we are committing to extending this to up to 12 months. While these longer Action Plans are in place, employers will be restricted in how they can use their licence, including limiting or removing the ability to sponsor overseas workers. If they do not comply with the Action Plan, fail to pay for the plan or make the necessary improvements by the end of their Action Plan, their sponsorship licence will be revoked.

We will take strong action against employers who do not comply with the rules, where necessary revoking their sponsor licence. We will strengthen this by making it harder for those with a long-term record of noncompliance to return to the sponsor register. The current penalties for breaking visa rules are too weak, with all revoked businesses only

facing 12 months of sanctions - regardless of their track record. That is why we will be introducing longer cooling off periods for businesses that repeatedly flout these rules or commit serious immigration breaches, barring them from applying for a sponsorship licence over this period and therefore hiring overseas workers.

This set of new measures shows how seriously the government takes maintaining the integrity of the visa and immigration system, and ensuring those who would seek to abuse the system face strong consequences. These measures are part of wider efforts to tackle the root causes behind the UK's long-term reliance on international workers and wider action to link migration policy with skills and wider labour market policy. All those who work in the UK deserve decent employment with decent employers - this Government is working to ensure that happens.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Local Government Finance

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon):
[\[HCWS265\]](#)

Today, the government has published details on the Local Government Finance Settlement for the next year for councils across England, and our wider ambitions for the sector over the course of this Parliament.

Councillors, officers and frontline staff are due our respect and appreciation for the work they have done to keep services going through very difficult times.

This government is under no illusion about the scale of the issues facing local government. We know that the demand for, and cost of, services has increased significantly – and that this has made the job for councils in recent years much harder. After a decade of cuts and fiscal mismanagement inflicted by the last government, compounded by spiralling inflation and a failure to grow our economy, councils of all political stripes are in crisis. Our fiscal inheritance means that there will be tough choices on all sides to get us back on the path to recovery, and it will take time.

We are taking immediate action to address these challenges. The Autumn Budget announced over £4 billion in additional funding for local government services, £1.3 billion of which will go through the Local Government Finance Settlement ('the Settlement'). Outside of the Settlement, the government has also announced additional funding to support local government across a range of priorities, including special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and homelessness services, a guarantee for income from the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR) scheme, as well as funding for local roads maintenance.

However, fixing the foundations of local government requires a programme of reform over the course of this Parliament. After years of delays, we will update the local government finance system. The current funding system is fundamentally broken, wasting taxpayers' money and starving authorities of the funding needed to provide the services we all rely on. The previous government agreed with us on the need to reform the system –

proposing a similar approach in its 'Fair Funding Review' – but where they were unable to, we will finish the job by consulting on and implementing an up-to-date assessment of needs and resources, starting in 2026-27. This will be the first multi-year funding Settlement in ten years.

Reform of local public services, so that they focus on prevention, is also critical if we are to end the cycle of system failure and cost escalation. We will reform the services that have for too long been overlooked by the previous government, to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable residents who rely on them - particularly children's social care, homelessness and rough sleeping, special educational needs and disabilities, and adult social care services.

We will reset the relationship with local government, working as equal partners to ensure that the sector delivers continuous improvement for its communities, operates at the highest standards of probity, and provides value for money; all while giving the sector greater autonomy, certainty and flexibility. We will rebuild the system of accountability and oversight in local government, including an overhaul of local audit, scrutiny and standards, and will consult on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

Our upcoming English Devolution White Paper will set out plans for a new governing settlement for England. This includes our landmark programme of devolution and reorganisation: giving powers to local leaders with skin in the game to generate new jobs, skills, and ultimately the growth that our public services rely on; and creating more efficient and accountable local authority structures, moving towards suitably sized unitary councils.

There is no magic wand. It will be a long, hard slog to work with councils to rebuild from the ground up, to deliver the services taxpayers need and deserve. Together, this year's Settlement and our programme of reform mark the first steps towards stabilising and rebuilding local government.

Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26

This year's Settlement will begin to put us on the right course, spending taxpayers' money efficiently, and ensuring that funding goes to the places that need it most. The Autumn Budget announced over £4 billion in additional funding for local government services, £1.3 billion of which will go through the Settlement. Overall, the provisional Settlement will ensure that local government receives a real-terms increase in Core Spending Power of around 3.2%.

In addition, the government announced at the Autumn Budget that it will guarantee that local authorities in England will receive at least £1.1 billion in total from the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging scheme in 2025-26.

In 2025-26, the Settlement will target additional funding to the places that need it most. We will deliver additional funding for a number of priorities, including an additional £680 million via the Social Care Grant; a new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, worth £250 million; and a new 'Recovery Grant', worth £600 million, for places with greater

need and demand for services (we have used deprivation as a proxy for this) and less ability to raise income locally. This tackles head on the combination of rocketing demand; low tax bases which restrict the ability of local areas to raise income locally; and weakened resilience in many of these councils after substantial central government funding cuts during the 2010s. Alongside this, our commitment can be judged against a guarantee that no local authority will see a reduction in their Core Spending Power in 2025-26, after taking account of any increase in council tax levels. This will provide the protections required for all authorities, including district councils, to sustain their services. Taking into account both money allocated to councils through the Settlement and the pEPR guarantee, every planning and social care council will have more to spend on services in 2025-26 than in 2024-25; and for almost all authorities we expect this to be an increase in real terms.

The government is clear in its commitment to tackle the issues that matter most to rural communities. We are focusing on the services that people rely on, such as social care, where pressures have grown across the country in recent years. This will deliver for rural areas just as it will for the whole country. In this context, funding from the Rural Services Delivery Grant will be repurposed through improved methods to target funding toward areas with greater need and demand for services, whilst investing in the priority services people care about such as adult and children's social care. The government believes that the Rural Services Delivery Grant is outdated and does not properly assess rural need. A large share of predominantly rural councils receive nothing from the Rural Services Delivery Grant. Put simply, it does not do as it claims. This is clearly not right, and the government is keen to hear from councils about how best to consider the impact of rurality on the costs of service delivery, and demand, as part of our longer-term consultations on local authority funding reform.

Further support for local government

The government is under no illusions about the scale of the issues facing local government, and this Settlement will begin to address the pressures that councils are under. We recognise, however, that we may see some continued instability as we adjust to the new system. Any council concerned about its financial position or its ability to set or maintain a balanced budget should contact MHCLG. The government has a framework in place to support councils in the most difficult positions. We will not seek to replicate conditions that made borrowing more expensive. Where a council in need of exceptional financial support views additional council tax increases as critical to maintaining their financial sustainability, the government will continue to consider requests for bespoke referendum principles. In considering requests, the government will take account of councils' specific circumstances, including the potential impact on local taxpayers.

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 local government. More information will be provided at the provisional Settlement.

Supporting households

Many households are still feeling the impact of the prolonged cost of living crisis and the government is committed to protecting local taxpayers from excessive council tax increases. The previous government, and the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) in March 2024, both assumed core council tax and adult social care precept referendum principles of 3% and 2% respectively. The government is now formally confirming that it will maintain the proposed core (3%) and adult social care precept (2%) referendum principles for next year. These strike the balance between protecting taxpayers and providing funding for local authorities.

We are ensuring that households receive the support they need from programmes outside the Settlement. The Autumn Budget confirmed the extension of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for a further year, from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026. This will ensure low-income households can continue to access support towards the cost of essentials, such as food, energy and water. Funding of £742 million will be provided to enable the HSF extension in England, plus additional funding for the Devolved Governments through the Barnett formula to be spent at their discretion, as usual.

Proposals in the policy statement for the 2025-26 Settlement will be subject to the usual consultation process at the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2024.

This Written Ministerial Statement covers England only. The policy statement will be deposited in the House libraries, and has been published on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-finance-policy-statement-2025-to-2026>

TRANSPORT

■ Integrated National Transport Strategy

Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh):

[\[HCWS266\]](#)

The Government has today set out its vision for the first integrated national transport strategy in over two decades, delivering on the commitment made in our manifesto.

For too long there has been no national plan for how transport should be designed and delivered in England, which has led to a fragmented and inefficient system that lacks join-up and cohesion. As a result, many of the people in our cities, towns and rural areas are poorly connected, with transport systems that don't work for them.

The Strategy will drive a cultural change where people are put at the heart of how we design, build and operate transport. At its core will be a single national vision for how transport systems should work together, empowering local leaders to deliver integrated local transport that meets the needs of their local community.

The transport system should be safe, reliable and accessible for everyone – improving passenger experience and unlocking equal access to opportunities across England. Walking and cycling should be the best choice for shorter journeys and, where driving is the right choice, these journeys should be smoother and more predictable. I want public

transport to be a more attractive option and for people to experience a seamlessly integrated transport network that works for them.

Today, I have announced my vision for this Strategy and launched a public Call for Ideas, which gives everyone the chance to share views about their own transport experiences and what could be done to improve them.

In the new year, my Department will host a series of regional roadshows around the country, giving local leaders, transport operators and passengers the opportunity to help shape the way we deliver a truly integrated transport network.

This Government is committed to ensuring that transport works for everyone, and this Strategy will set the framework for how we meet people's needs today and in the future.