



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 29 November 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (03:36 P.M., 29 November 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

### CONTENTS

|  |           |   |           |
|--|-----------|---|-----------|
| <b>ANSWERS</b>   | <b>7</b>  |   |           |
| <b>BUSINESS AND TRADE</b>                              | <b>7</b>  |   |           |
| ■ Aerosols: Limonene                                   | 7         | ■ Holiday Accommodation: Registration                 | 13        |
| ■ Business: South West                                 | 7         | ■ Sports: Children                                    | 13        |
| ■ Construction: Materials                              | 7         | ■ Swimming Pools: Finance                             | 14        |
| ■ Department for Business and Trade: Consultants       | 8         | ■ VisitBritain: Finance                               | 14        |
| ■ Employment Rights Bill: Social Security Benefits     | 8         | ■ Welsh National Opera                                | 14        |
| ■ Groceries Code Adjudicator                           | 9         | <b>DEFENCE</b>  | <b>15</b> |
| ■ Groceries Code Adjudicator: Finance                  | 9         | ■ Armed Forces: Accidents                             | 15        |
| ■ Parental Leave                                       | 9         | ■ Army Reserve: Pensions                              | 15        |
| ■ Post Offices: Driving Licences                       | 10        | ■ Defence Fire and Rescue Service: Health Services    | 16        |
| ■ Post Offices: Passports                              | 10        | ■ Defence Fire and Rescue Service: Workplace Pensions | 16        |
| ■ Post Offices: Profits                                | 10        | ■ Defence: Procurement                                | 16        |
| ■ Post Offices: Security Industry Authority            | 11        | ■ Global Combat Air Programme                         | 17        |
| ■ Post Offices: South West                             | 11        | ■ Israel: F-35 Aircraft                               | 17        |
| <b>CABINET OFFICE</b>                                  | <b>11</b> | ■ Military Aid: Storms                                | 17        |
| ■ Civil Servants: Redundancy                           | 11        | ■ Ministry of Defence: Consultants                    | 18        |
| ■ Senior Civil Servants: Freedom of Information        | 12        | <b>EDUCATION</b>                                      | <b>18</b> |
| <b>CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b>                        | <b>12</b> | ■ Apprentices: Disadvantaged                          | 18        |
| ■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Consultants | 12        | ■ Betchwood Vale Academy                              | 19        |
|  |           | ■ Children: Protection                                | 19        |
|  |           | ■ Overseas Students: Ukraine                          | 20        |
|  |           | ■ Overseas Students: Visas                            | 20        |

|  |    |   |    |
|--|----|---|----|
| ■ Postgraduate Education   | 21 | ■ National Grid   | 34 |
| ■ Private Education: Special Educational Needs                   | 21 | ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS                         | 34 |
| ■ Pupils: Attendance   | 22 | ■ Electronic Cigarettes: Waste Disposal                     | 34 |
| ■ School Support Staff Negotiating Body                          | 22 | ■ Plants: Import Controls                                   | 35 |
| ■ Schools: Coventry  | 23 | FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE                | 35 |
| ■ Schools: Finance   | 23 | ■ Embassies: St Andrew's Day                                | 35 |
| ■ Schools: Greater Manchester                                    | 24 | ■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Consultants | 36 |
| ■ Special Educational Needs                                      | 24 | ■ Hamas: Hostage Taking                                     | 36 |
| ■ Special Educational Needs: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole | 25 | ■ Religious Freedom   | 37 |
| ■ Special Educational Needs: Down's Syndrome                     | 26 | HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE                                      | 37 |
| ■ Special Educational Needs: Young People                        | 27 | ■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Children        | 37 |
| ■ Students: Disadvantaged  | 28 | ■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Halton          | 38 |
| ■ Students: Loans  | 28 | ■ Autism: Health Services                                   | 38 |
| ■ T-levels: Havering   | 29 | ■ Breast Cancer: Diagnosis                                  | 39 |
| ■ Turing Scheme: Private Education                               | 29 | ■ Charities: Employers' Contributions                       | 39 |
| ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO                                     | 30 | ■ Coronavirus: Vaccination                                  | 40 |
| ■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Consultants       | 30 | ■ Dental Services   | 40 |
| ■ Energy: Billing  | 30 | ■ Dental Services: Grimsby                                  | 40 |
| ■ Energy: Housing  | 31 | ■ Dental Services: Tees Valley                              | 41 |
| ■ Energy: Prices   | 31 | ■ Department of Health and Social Care: Consultants         | 46 |
| ■ Fuel Poverty: Lincolnshire                                     | 31 | ■ General Practitioners                                     | 46 |
| ■ Fuel Poverty: Norfolk  | 31 | ■ General Practitioners: Kent                               | 47 |
| ■ Hydrogen   | 32 | ■ Health Services: Rural Areas                              | 48 |
| ■ Insulation: Housing  | 33 | ■ Hormone Replacement Therapy                               | 48 |
| ■ Mortgages: Energy Performance Certificates                     | 33 | ■ Hospices: Finance   | 49 |
|  |    | ■ Hospices: Rural Areas                                     | 49 |

|   |    |   |    |
|---|----|---|----|
| ■ Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency: Fees and Charges | 50 | ■ Police Community Support Officers: Greater Manchester | 64 |
| ■ Mental Health Services: Schools                                       | 51 | ■ Police: Bureaucracy                                   | 64 |
| ■ Mental Health Services: Software                                      | 51 | ■ Police: Employers' Contributions                      | 64 |
| ■ Methylphenidate: Shortages  | 51 | ■ Police: Recruitment                                   | 65 |
| ■ NHS: Managers   | 52 | ■ Pregabalin: Misuse                                    | 65 |
| ■ NHS: Telephone Services   | 53 | ■ Undocumented Migrants: Crime                          | 66 |
| ■ NHS: Termination of Employment  | 53 | HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT               | 66 |
| ■ NHS: Translation Services   | 54 | ■ Agriculture: Compulsory Purchase                      | 66 |
| ■ Nurses: Training  | 55 | ■ Bellwin Scheme  | 67 |
| ■ Pharmacy: Employers' Contributions                                    | 55 | ■ Buildings: Co-ownership                               | 67 |
| ■ Pharmacy: Finance   | 56 | ■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances                        | 67 |
| ■ Post-mortems  | 56 | ■ Cladding Safety Scheme: Slough                        | 67 |
| ■ Prescriptions: ICT  | 57 | ■ Community Ownership Fund                              | 68 |
| ■ Primodos: Research  | 57 | ■ Council Tax: Probate                                  | 68 |
| ■ Psilocybin  | 58 | ■ Councillors' Interests                                | 68 |
| ■ Social Services   | 58 | ■ Devolution: Hertfordshire                             | 69 |
| ■ Torbay Hospital: Finance  | 59 | ■ Economic Growth: South West                           | 70 |
| HOME OFFICE   | 59 | ■ Electric Vehicles and Heat Pumps                      | 70 |
| ■ Agricultural Machinery and Livestock: Theft                           | 59 | ■ Empty Property and Second Homes: Council Tax          | 71 |
| ■ Asylum: Detainees   | 60 | ■ Floods: Cambridgeshire                                | 71 |
| ■ Buildings: Insulation   | 60 | ■ Green Belt  | 71 |
| ■ Firearms: Licensing   | 61 | ■ High Rise Flats: Fire Extinguishers                   | 72 |
| ■ Home Office: Consultants  | 61 | ■ High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention                      | 72 |
| ■ Illegal Migration Act 2023  | 62 | ■ Holiday Accommodation: Taxation                       | 73 |
| ■ Licensing Act 2003  | 62 |   |    |
| ■ Licensing Laws  | 62 |   |    |
| ■ Migrants: Detainees   | 62 |   |    |
| ■ Non-crime Hate Incidents  | 63 |   |    |

|   |    |  |    |
|---|----|--|----|
| ■ Housing: Hertsmere                    | 73 | ■ Prisons: Education   | 88 |
| ■ Leasehold: Forfeiture                 | 74 | ■ Prisons: Standards   | 88 |
| ■ Leasehold: Ground Rent                | 74 | ■ Probation: Staff   | 88 |
| ■ Leasehold: Reform                     | 74 | ■ Probation: Standards   | 89 |
| ■ Local Government                      | 74 | ■ Reparation by Offenders  | 89 |
| ■ Local Government Finance              | 75 | NORTHERN IRELAND   | 90 |
| ■ Local Government:<br>Accountability   | 75 | ■ Voting Rights: Young People  | 90 |
| ■ Local Government: Elections           | 76 | SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND<br>TECHNOLOGY                                  | 90 |
| ■ Local Government: Equality            | 76 | ■ Animal Experiments   | 90 |
| ■ Local Government: Staff               | 77 | ■ Broadband: Advertising   | 91 |
| ■ Local Plans                           | 77 | ■ Department for Science,<br>Innovation and Technology:<br>Consultants | 91 |
| ■ Mayors: Cheshire                      | 78 | ■ Government Digital Service:<br>Fujitsu                               | 92 |
| ■ Parking: Private Sector               | 78 | ■ Innovation and Research  | 92 |
| ■ Planning Authorities: Staff           | 78 | ■ Innovation and Research:<br>Warwickshire                             | 93 |
| ■ Private Rented Housing:<br>Licensing  | 79 | ■ Innovation and Research:<br>Defence                                  | 94 |
| ■ Property: Registration                | 80 | ■ Innovation and Research:<br>Devolution                               | 94 |
| ■ Renters' Rights Bill                  | 80 | ■ Innovation and Research:<br>Newcastle-under-Lyme                     | 95 |
| ■ Social Rented Housing:<br>Eligibility | 80 | ■ Innovation: Gloucester   | 95 |
| ■ Solar Power: Planning<br>Permission   | 81 | ■ Medicine: Research   | 95 |
| JUSTICE                                 | 81 | ■ Project Gigabit and Shared<br>Rural Network                          | 96 |
| ■ Asylum and Immigration:<br>Tribunals  | 81 | ■ Technology: South Norfolk  | 96 |
| ■ Courts: Fines                         | 82 | TRANSPORT  | 97 |
| ■ Courts: Interpreters                  | 83 | ■ Avanti West Coast: North<br>Wales                                    | 97 |
| ■ Justices' clerks: Telford             | 83 | ■ Bus Services: Finance  | 97 |
| ■ Legal Aid: Shropshire                 | 84 | ■ Bus Services: Lancashire   | 98 |
| ■ Magistrates' Courts: Telford          | 85 | ■ Bus Services: Schools  | 98 |
| ■ Prisoners                             | 85 |  |    |
| ■ Prisoners' Release                    | 87 |  |    |
| ■ Prisoners Release:<br>Homelessness    | 87 |  |    |

|   |     |  |            |
|---|-----|--|------------|
| ■ Bus Services: South Norfolk                         | 98  | WOMEN AND EQUALITIES   | 109        |
| ■ Buses and Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Young People | 99  | ■ Assistance Animals: Business Premises  | 109        |
| ■ Buses: Carbon Emissions                             | 99  | ■ Equal Pay: Gender  | 109        |
| ■ Cycling: Gloucester                                 | 100 | ■ Office for Equality and Opportunity: Gender and Sexuality                          | 110        |
| ■ Department for Transport: Consultants               | 100 | ■ Private Sector: Pay  | 110        |
| ■ Driving Tests: Applications                         | 101 | WORK AND PENSIONS  | 111        |
| ■ Electric Bicycles                                   | 101 | ■ Employment: Endometriosis and Periods  | 111        |
| ■ Electric Vehicles: Grants                           | 102 | ■ Hydrogen   | 111        |
| ■ Euston Station: Bus Services                        | 102 | ■ Social Security Benefits: Deductions   | 112        |
| ■ London North Eastern Railway: WiFi                  | 102 | ■ Social Security Benefits: Disability   | 113        |
| ■ Lower Thames Crossing                               | 102 | <b>WRITTEN STATEMENTS</b>  | <b>114</b> |
| ■ Manchester Metrolink: Stockport                     | 103 | BUSINESS AND TRADE   | 114        |
| ■ Network Rail  | 103 | ■ Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)      | 114        |
| ■ Northern Trains: Standards                          | 104 | CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT   | 115        |
| ■ Pedicabs: Vetting                                   | 104 | ■ BBC funding model work, licence fee uplift, and Simple Payment Plan                | 115        |
| ■ Public Transport: Care Leavers                      | 104 | DEFENCE  | 117        |
| ■ Railway Stations                                    | 105 | ■ Continuation of existing Contingent Liability in support of Ukraine                | 117        |
| ■ Railways: Franchises                                | 105 | HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE   | 118        |
| ■ Railways: WiFi                                      | 105 | ■ Publication of the HIV Action Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2024 Report | 118        |
| TREASURY  | 106 |  |            |
| ■ Employers Contributions                             | 106 |  |            |
| ■ Employment: Policy                                  | 106 |  |            |
| ■ High Speed 2 Line: Finance                          | 107 |  |            |
| ■ Ministers: Codes of Practice                        | 107 |  |            |
| ■ Social Services: National Insurance Contributions   | 108 |  |            |
| ■ Workplace Pensions: Interest Rates                  | 108 |  |            |

**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

#### ■ **Aerosols: Limonene**

**Jess Brown-Fuller:**

[\[15633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of limiting the use of limonene in commercial aerosol products.

**Justin Madders:**

The safety of commercial aerosols is regulated by the General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR), and other sector specific regulations. GPSR provides a baseline of safety for applicable products, requiring that only safe products, can be sold. Additionally, limonene is also used in cosmetics and is included in the list of restricted ingredients under the UK Cosmetic Regulation.

The government is confident that the current restrictions on limonene are sufficient to ensure that products are safe. However, to ensure that products remain safe, the government keeps the regulatory framework under constant review, including the use of specific chemicals in particular products.

#### ■ **Business: South West**

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[15586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to support business investment in (a) Gloucester constituency and (b) the South West.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) promotes and supports investment opportunities across all of the UK. In Gloucester, DBT has a strong relationship with the County Council and proactively promotes the counties sector strengths, particularly in areas such as Technology and Cyber Security, AgriTech and Advanced Manufacturing. This includes highlighting key developments like The Forum in Gloucester City Centre.

DBT recognises the strength of opportunity across the South West region for investors, both in the sectors listed above but also in Floating Offshore Wind, Critical Minerals, Nuclear, Quantum and AI. In addition, Tata's announcement earlier this year to build a gigafactory in Somerset is expected to create further opportunities for inward investors in the region.

#### ■ **Construction: Materials**

**Colum Eastwood:**

[\[16247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether the Office for Product Safety and Standards has made an estimate of the number of constructions using (a) Mica, (b) Pyrite and (c) other defective building materials in Northern Ireland.

**Justin Madders:**

The Office for Product Safety and Standards was appointed by MHCLG in April 2021 as the national regulator of construction products, overseeing conformity of construction products with designated standards under the Construction Products Regulations 2013. In this role, OPSS has not made any estimates of the number of constructions in Northern Ireland using Mica, Pyrite or defective materials.

■ **Department for Business and Trade: Consultants**

**Dan Carden:**[\[15515\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much his Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Justin Madders:**

The Department for Business and Trade is a newly formed Department established in February 2023. The new department absorbed the functions of the former Department for International Trade (DIT) and some of the functions of the former Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

The amount spent on consultancy by both departments are as follows:

| YEAR | DIT      | BEIS     |
|------|----------|----------|
| 2021 | £5,782   | £636,000 |
| 2022 | £380,000 | £587,000 |
| 2023 | £865,000 | £649,000 |

The Department publishes its annual expenditure on consultancy in its Annual Report and Accounts.

■ **Employment Rights Bill: Social Security Benefits**

**Danny Kruger:**[\[15912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill on the number of people claiming (a) Universal Credit and (b) other benefits.

**Justin Madders:**

The Employment Rights Bill Impact Assessments show that by boosting protections and the quality of work for the lowest paid in the labour market, who are concentrated in more deprived areas of the UK, the package will help to raise living standards across the country and create opportunities for all. We believe the risk to employment prospects for these groups is small, with the benefits the Bill delivers to them being greater.



## ■ Groceries Code Adjudicator

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has plans to widen the scope of the Groceries Code Adjudicator.

**Justin Madders:**

The Groceries Code Adjudicator enforces the Groceries Supply Code of Practice which regulates the relationship between large supermarkets in the UK and their direct suppliers. At the production end of the supply chain, powers in the Agriculture Act allow the government to introduce 'Fair Dealings' Regulations, applying to businesses when purchasing agricultural products from farmers. Such regulations have been introduced to cover the UK dairy sector and will be enforced by the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator.

The government will continue to monitor the supply chain and will deliver a resilient and healthy food system, with a new deal that ensures fairness in the supply chain across all sectors.

## ■ Groceries Code Adjudicator: Finance

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of lowering the turnover threshold to £500,000 for businesses that are required to fund the Groceries Code Adjudicator.

**Justin Madders:**

The Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) is currently funded by an annual levy on the 14 large retailers that are designated under the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (the Code) by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). The CMA assesses annually whether retailers which have a turnover exceeding £1bn of grocery sales in the UK should be designated under the Code. The £1bn threshold is set out in the Groceries (Supply Chain Practices) Market Investigation Order 2009 which is the responsibility of the CMA.

## ■ Parental Leave

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when his Department will launch the review of the parental leave system.

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of the level of statutory paternity leave on new families.

**Justin Madders:**

As committed to in the Plan to Make Work Pay, the Government will review the system of parental leave, including Paternity Leave, to ensure that it best supports working families. We are in the early planning stage for this Review and are actively considering its parameters.

■ **Post Offices: Driving Licences**

**Alex Mayer:** [\[15308\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many DVLA photocard renewals were made at a Crown Post Office last year.

**Gareth Thomas:**

According to the Post Office, the number of DVLA photocard renewals made at Directly Managed Branches for the 2023/2024 Financial Year was 55,014.

Across the total network, the number of DVLA photocard renewals made for the same Financial Year was 525,827.

■ **Post Offices: Passports**

**Alex Mayer:** [\[15309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many Paper Check and Send for (a) new and (b) renewal Passports appointments were made at Crown Post offices in the last year for which figures are available.

**Gareth Thomas:**

As it is not possible to categorise Paper Check & Send applications by whether they are 'New' or 'Renewal', the Post Office have also shared their statistics for Digital Check & Send applications.

The number of *Passport Paper Check & Send* applications made at Directly Managed Branches for the 2023/2024 Financial Year was 16,733. Across the total network, the number of *Passport Paper Check & Send* applications made for the same Financial Year was 175,924

Comparatively, the number of *Passport Digital Check & Send* applications made at Directly Managed Branches for the 2023/2024 Financial Year was 60,253. Across the total network, the number of *Passport Digital Check & Send* applications made for the same Financial Year was 430,755.

■ **Post Offices: Profits**

**Alex Mayer:** [\[15306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many Crown post offices make a profit.

**Gareth Thomas:**

Directly Managed Branches are loss-making for the Post Office. As such, Post Office has been clear that it's their ambition to operate the network on a fully franchised

basis in time, as they believe that this is a more sustainable model. The Post Office's Transformation Plan aims to deliver a reduction in central costs and look seriously at other ways to deliver efficiencies.

The Post Office will however continue to deliver on the 11,500 minimum branch requirement and geographical access criteria set by Government.

#### ■ **Post Offices: Security Industry Authority**

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[15307\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many Security Industry Authority licence applications were made at a Crown Post Office last year.

**Gareth Thomas:**

According to the Post Office, the number of Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence applications made at Directly Managed Branches for the 2023/2024 Financial Year was 15,150.

Across the total network, the number of SIA licensed applications made for the same Financial Year was 97,954.

#### ■ **Post Offices: South West**

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[15585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to improve access to Post Office services in (a) Gloucester and (b) the South West.

**Gareth Thomas:**

Government remains committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Post Office network, and as stated in our manifesto, Government will work to strengthen the network in the South West and across the country in consultation with postmasters, trade unions and customers.

Government already provides an annual £50m Network Subsidy funding to support the delivery of a minimum number of branches and a geographical spread of branches in line with published access criteria. This requires 99% of the UK population to be within three miles of their nearest Post Office outlet therefore ensuring the viability of rural and community branches. The Government-set Access Criteria ensures that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

### CABINET OFFICE

#### ■ **Civil Servants: Redundancy**

**Mr Peter Bedford:**

[\[15695\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many employee settlement agreements there were within the civil service in each year since 2020; and what the total value of such agreements was.

**Georgia Gould:**

Full information on the use of settlement agreements is held by individual departments.

**■ Senior Civil Servants: Freedom of Information****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[15229\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what (a) internal and (b) external guidance his Department has produced for Departments on whether Freedom of Information Act requests requesting information on senior civil servants should be disclosed.

**Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:**

The Cabinet Office has not issued either internal or external guidance on whether Freedom of Information Act requests requesting information on senior civil servants should be disclosed. All requests are considered on their own merits in all circumstances.

**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT****■ Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Consultants****Dan Carden:**[\[15523\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much her Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

2021-22 - The consultancy spend was £17.5m for DCMS core department as can be seen in note 4.3 page 146 of our laid annual report and accounts -

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/638883e6d3bf7f3282be4061/DCMS\\_Annual\\_Report\\_and\\_Accounts\\_2021-22\\_-\\_web\\_accessible\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/638883e6d3bf7f3282be4061/DCMS_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2021-22_-_web_accessible_version.pdf)

2022-23 - The consultancy spend was £9.1m for DCMS core department as can be seen in note 4.3 page 165 of our laid annual report and accounts -

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/656e02469462260705c568ca/E03016038\\_HC\\_255\\_Dept\\_of\\_Culture\\_Media\\_and\\_Sport\\_ARA\\_2022-23\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/656e02469462260705c568ca/E03016038_HC_255_Dept_of_Culture_Media_and_Sport_ARA_2022-23_Accessible.pdf)

2023-24 - The consultancy spend was £2.6m for DCMS core department; this is within the total for the DCMS group consultancy spend of £15.2m as can be seen in note 4.3 page 167 of our laid annual report and accounts -

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/673f1ae44ebce30ac7baf00d/E03231133\\_DCMS\\_ARA\\_2023-24\\_ACCESSIBLE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/673f1ae44ebce30ac7baf00d/E03231133_DCMS_ARA_2023-24_ACCESSIBLE.pdf)

The figures for 2021-22 and 2022-23 are on a pre Machinery of Government basis and therefore included costings for Digital related activities that are transferred to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

The figures for consultancy spend after 1 April 2024 will not be available until our 2024-25 accounts have been laid in parliament and published.

The Government is committed to restoring the public finances and delivering value for the taxpayer.

As part of this wider mission, the Government has pledged to reduce wasteful spend on non-essential and expensive consultants in order to save over £1.2 billion by 2026.

## ■ **Holiday Accommodation: Registration**

**Rachel Blake:**

[\[15319\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13348 on Private Rented Housing: Rents, what her planned timetable is for introducing a registration scheme for short-term lets; and whether planning permission and licensing will have to have been secured for properties to be listed on the scheme.

**Chris Bryant:**

Parliament legislated for a registration scheme for short-term lets in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, and we are committed to introducing such a scheme as soon as possible. We will be consulting on this shortly, including on the specific requirements for registration. The government is also considering what additional powers might be given to local authorities to enable them to respond to the pressures that can be created by short-term lets.

**Steve Darling:**

[\[15387\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when her Department plans to introduce a short-term let registration scheme.

**Chris Bryant:**

Parliament legislated for a registration scheme for short-term lets in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, and we are committed to introducing such a scheme as soon as possible.

We will soon be consulting on how the scheme will work and on the legislative process that will bring the scheme to life.

## ■ **Sports: Children**

**Mr Lee Dillon:**

[\[15543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 6 November 2024 to Question 11698 on Sports: Children, what steps she is taking to help ensure the adequacy of access to grassroots sports facilities for children under 12.

**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 every child to access high-quality sport and physical activity, especially those who are less likely to be active. The Government's clear ambition is for all children and young people to have the opportunity to get active in a way that suits them.

This Government recognises that grassroots sports facilities are central to communities up and down the country and is acting to support more children to get active wherever they live through the delivery of the £123 million Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme in 2024/25.

### ■ **Swimming Pools: Finance**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[15208\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 1 November 2024 to Question 10847 on Leisure Centres: Government Assistance, whether she plans to hold further rounds of the Swimming Pool Support Fund.

**Stephanie Peacock:**

The Government recognises that sports facilities in communities up and down the country help to support more people to get active wherever they live.

The previous Swimming Pool Support Fund was a targeted, one-time, urgent package which has now closed, and further funding rounds were not built into the programme by the previous government.

The responsibility of providing access to public swimming pools lies at Local Authority level. The Government continues to encourage Local Authorities to support swimming facilities.

### ■ **VisitBritain: Finance**

**Mr Andrew Snowden:** [\[15344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the funding her Department provides Visit Britain.

**Chris Bryant:**

Funding allocations for VisitBritain are reviewed as part of the comprehensive spending review process, which in turn depends on the recent Budget. I note the Honorable Member's bid for additional funding - and his opposition to the Budget. It is difficult to see how one can will the ends but not the means.

### ■ **Welsh National Opera**

**Chris Evans:** [\[15171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department is taking steps to support Welsh National Opera.

**Chris Bryant:**

I have held a series of very productive meetings with the Wales Office, Welsh Government, Arts Council England, and Welsh National Opera to understand the issue in more detail and to see how, within the parameters of the arm's length principle, I can best help ensure a strong and secure future for the WNO.

The core point of commonality across all these meetings and across all partners was a recognition of the value of the Welsh National Opera and its work - for the people of England as well as for the people of Wales. It was clear that all partners are keen to achieve a positive long-term future for the organisation, and are working towards that goal.

I was pleased that this series of meetings was able to reassure everyone that all partners wanted to see a positive future for Welsh National Opera, that the funding bodies across the border will work more collaboratively in future and that the new leadership at the WNO have a clear idea of how to progress. Everyone wants to burnish and sustain the WNO so that as many people as possible in Wales and England have a chance to enjoy world class opera close to home. Funding decisions are for the Welsh Arts Council and Arts Council England, but I am confident that the WNO is in a strong place to succeed.

## DEFENCE

### ■ **Armed Forces: Accidents**

**James Cartlidge:**

[\[16238\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential (a) causes and (b) consequences of the recent road traffic incident in Estonia involving British armed forces personnel.

**Luke Pollard:**

The safety and welfare of our personnel is of the utmost importance. An Estonian investigation is underway and it would be inappropriate to comment whilst inquiries are ongoing. In addition, as with all incidents of this nature, an internal review is being conducted in-theatre about further preventative measures to ensure the safety of our deployed personnel.

My thoughts are with all those affected, and I wish those injured a full, swift recovery.

### ■ **Army Reserve: Pensions**

**Lee Anderson:**

[\[15499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his policy is on the payment of military reservist pensions for pre-2015 service.

**Maria Eagle:**

Following legal advice, the Ministry of Defence has lodged an appeal against the Milroy employment tribunal ruling. We are unable to comment further while the appeal is ongoing.

**■ Defence Fire and Rescue Service: Health Services**

**Jon Trickett:** [\[15413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to ensure (a) occupational health support and (b) other the health and wellbeing measures for Defence Fire and Rescue Services are similar to those provided to (i) Local Authority and (ii) Civil Aviation Authority Fire Services.

**Maria Eagle:**

Defence Fire and Rescue Service personnel are provided with occupational health support through the Defence Business Services Occupational Health contract. Additional support can be accessed through the Ministry of Defence People Portal and the Civil Service Benevolent Fund. Occupational health support offers vary in Local Authority Fire and Rescue Service areas and the Civil Aviation Authority Fire Service.

**■ Defence Fire and Rescue Service: Workplace Pensions**

**Jon Trickett:** [\[15412\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to equalise the pension age of Defence Fire and Rescue Service workers with their counterparts in (a) Local Authority and (b) Civil Aviation Authority Fire Services.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Defence Fire and Rescue Service (DFRS) have no plans to equalise the pension age of its personnel with their counterparts in Local Authority and Civil Aviation Authority Fire Services.

**Jon Trickett:** [\[15414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will provide Defence Fire and Rescue Service workers an early pension get out clause at 57.

**Maria Eagle:**

As Civil Servants, the Defence Fire and Rescue Service (DFRS) workforce pension scheme is administered by My Civil Service Pension and in accordance with MOD policy. Each occupation group can only apply the rules, in which Trade Unions have been consulted, associated with their particular pension scheme. Members of the DFRS continue to be subject to a Normal Retirement Age (NRA) of 65 but they may request approval to continue working beyond the NRA.

**■ Defence: Procurement**

**Chris Evans:** [\[15172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support UK defence manufacturing jobs through government procurement.



**Maria Eagle:**

The UK's defence manufacturing industry is vital not only to our national security but to our prosperity and economic growth. This Government is committed to supporting UK manufacturing jobs and will bring forward a new Defence Industrial Strategy to align the imperatives of national security and a high-growth economy.

**Global Combat Air Programme****James Cartlidge:**[\[16232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7495 on Global Combat Air Programme, whether the Strategic Defence Review will consider whether the core programme will be piloted.

**Maria Eagle:**

The Strategic Defence Review will guide future capability development priorities, to ensure the United Kingdom is secure at home and strong abroad - now and for the years to come.

The Global Combat Air Programme core aircraft is being designed to be crewed when it comes into service, but the programme sustains an important technological and industrial pathway to developing advanced uncrewed capabilities, allowing the programme to maximise the benefits of autonomy and Artificial Intelligence in a crewed aircraft as well as to explore options for uncrewed capability augmentation in the future.

**Israel: F-35 Aircraft****Clive Lewis:**[\[15836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether F-35 components were sent from RAF Marham to Israel between October 2023 and August 2024.

**Maria Eagle:**

At the request of the US led F-35 Programme, there were 14 transfers of F-35 components from RAF Marham to Israel between October 2023 and August 2024. The transferred components are the property of the US Department of Defense.

In keeping with the Government's announcement on arms exports in September, there have been no exports of F-35 parts direct to Israel via RAF Marham since the licensing suspension.

**Military Aid: Storms****Robin Swann:**[\[16379\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any Military Aid to the Civil Authorities requests have been made as a result of storm Bert.

**Luke Pollard:**

No.

## ■ Ministry of Defence: Consultants

**Dan Carden:** [\[15518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Maria Eagle:**

The table below gives the overall expenditure on consultancies in the last five financial years by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), On Vote Agencies, Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Other Bodies (such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Royal Hospital Chelsea, the Reserve Forces and Cadet Associations and International Military Services Ltd.).

| FINANCIAL YEAR | CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE (£MILLION) |
|----------------|------------------------------------|
| 2020-21        | 109.668                            |
| 2021-22        | 134.942                            |
| 2022-23        | 149.105                            |
| 2023-24        | 86.276                             |

We have taken immediate action to stop all non-essential government consultancy spending in 2024-25 as part of our commitment to secure value for money for taxpayers, crack down on waste, and get a grip of MOD budgets

## EDUCATION

### ■ Apprentices: Disadvantaged

**Jodie Gosling:** [\[14498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that apprenticeship opportunities are made more widely available for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Janet Daby:**

This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity. As part of this, we want to ensure that more people from disadvantaged backgrounds can undertake apprenticeships.

The department continues to pay additional funding to employers and training providers to support them to take on young apprentices, apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities, and care leavers.

The department has begun work to develop new foundation apprenticeships, providing high quality entry pathways for young people. We will engage with relevant stakeholders to inform our thinking to maximise the positive impact on young people,

including those in disadvantaged areas. More detail on foundation apprenticeships will be set out in due course.

## ■ **Betchwood Vale Academy**

**Chris Coghlan:**

[\[16109\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help progress the planning application for Betchwood Vale Academy.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The construction contractor, appointed by the department to progress the detailed designs, is currently producing the necessary reports and surveys required to submit the planning application for Betchwood Academy.

## ■ **Children: Protection**

**Alex Easton:**

[\[15614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking steps to (a) investigate allegations of (i) bullying, (ii) physical violence, (iii) sexual violence and (iv) suicides in schools and (b) (i) protect children and (ii) uphold their rights under Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

**Stephen Morgan:**

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

Schools should be calm, safe and supportive environments which children want to attend, and which support them to learn and thrive. Any form of violence in school is completely unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

By law, schools must have a behaviour policy. It is for school leaders to develop and implement behaviour policies that work for their own schools and school community, including measures to prevent all forms of bullying. Any policy must be lawful, proportionate and reasonable, and comply with the school's duties under the Equality Act 2010, Education and Inspections Act 2006 and Human Rights Act 1998.

While the department expects schools to take immediate and robust action if incidents of violence occur, including sexual violence, any decision on how to sanction the pupil or pupils involved is a matter for the school. The department does not investigate individual cases. In the most serious cases, suspensions and permanent exclusion may be necessary to ensure that teachers and pupils are protected from disruption and to maintain safe, calm environments. Should the incident constitute a criminal offence, the school should report it to the police. When a report of child-on-child sexual violence or sexual harassment is made, schools should follow the general safeguarding principles set out in 'Keeping children safe in education' statutory guidance.

**■ Overseas Students: Ukraine****Mike Martin:** [\[16106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent guidance her Department has issued on whether students who have extended their visas under the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme are eligible for home fees status for university fees in England.

**Janet Daby:**

The department laid the Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 on 22 May which ensures that students who have been granted leave under the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme will qualify for student support in England and home fee status from the 2024/25 academic year, without requiring them to meet the normal three year ordinary residence requirement. This is in line with those granted leave under the other Ukraine schemes.

The Student Loans Company will make the necessary amendments to guidance in time for when the scheme opens.

**■ Overseas Students: Visas****Dr Scott Arthur:** [\[R\] \[14843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the causes of changes in the level of international student visa applications to UK universities in 2024.

**Dr Scott Arthur:** [\[R\] \[14844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes in the level of international student visa applications to UK universities in 2024 on the sector.

**Janet Daby:**

The latest Home Office data shows that there were 350,700 visa applications made by international students for a sponsored study visa between January and September 2024. This is 16% lower than between January and September 2023 when 417,000 sponsored study visas applications were made by international students.

There are many factors that influence international students when they choose to study abroad. These may include the range and quality of available courses, the visa rules that apply in countries they are considering and the appeal of living and studying in those countries.

The government recognises that international students enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and become global ambassadors for the UK, as well as making a significant economic contribution to the higher education (HE) sector and our country as a whole. It is for these reasons that the government offers international students the opportunity to remain in the UK on a graduate visa for two to three years after their studies come to an end.

The department will continue to monitor available data and engage closely with the HE sector to assess the level of international student admissions to UK universities in the 2024/25 academic year.

## ■ Postgraduate Education

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support postgraduate students.

**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to increase funding for postgraduate researchers.

**Janet Daby:**

The government introduced postgraduate loans which, alongside other sources of funding, are a contribution to the cost of postgraduate level study to stimulate take-up.

Decisions on student finance have had to be taken to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and that the costs of higher education (HE) are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university

We will set out this government's longer term plan for HE reform by summer 2025.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is working with key postgraduate research stakeholders to deliver a UK postgraduate research offer under the New Deal for Postgraduate Research that attracts, empowers and supports talent. Between the 2021/22 and 2024/25 academic years, UKRI has raised the minimum student stipend that UKRI funded students receive by over 23% in cash terms.

## ■ Private Education: Special Educational Needs

**Tom Morrison:** [\[16256\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with specialist schools that deal with children with the most complex disabilities on the increase in employer National Insurance contributions announced in the budget.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The government has agreed that the department will be compensated for the increase in National Insurance Contributions (NICs) paid by state-funded schools, and work is in progress to determine how much the department will receive for those employers within its remit and how that funding will be distributed. The department will engage with key stakeholders on our approach to the NICs funding and will provide more information as soon as is practicable.

Compensation for the NICs will be additional to the £1 billion increase to high needs funding announced at the 30 October Budget. Due to timing constraints, NICs funding

will need to be provided as a separate grant, alongside the dedicated schools grant, in 2025/26.

## ■ Pupils: Attendance

**Rupert Lowe:**

[15537]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the total amount of fines collected for taking children out of school during term time was in each of the last five years, broken down by local authority.

**Stephen Morgan:**

The department collects information from local authorities on penalty notices issued for unauthorised absence, including numbers of penalty notices issued, paid within 21 days, paid within 28 days, and other outcomes. This is published in the statistical release 'parental responsibility measures' and can be accessed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/parental-responsibility-measures>.

The amount payable was £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt, rising to £120 if paid between 22 and 28 days. From August 2024, the fine for school absences is £80 if paid within 21 days, or £160 if paid within 28 days. In the case of repeated fines, if a parent receives a second fine for the same child within any three-year period, this will be charged at the higher rate of £160.

The number of penalty notices issued, paid within 21 days, paid within 28 days, and other outcomes, by local authorities and for England, can be accessed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/3d370ede-53eb-454f-f8ae-08dd0adc50ad>.

## ■ School Support Staff Negotiating Body

**Laurence Turner:**

[R] [15610]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent progress she has made on establishing the School Support Staff Negotiating Body.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

School support staff are an essential part of the school workforce, and the department recognises that they are crucial to ensuring we give children the best possible life chances.

That is why the reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) is a priority for this government. The department has recently set out plans to reinstate the SSSNB through the Employment Rights Bill, introduced in parliament on 10 October 2024. This is currently at the Committee Stage in the House of Commons. The SSSNB will have a remit to negotiate pay and terms and conditions, and to advise on training and career progression for school support staff in state-funded schools in England. The Body will be composed of representatives of employers, representatives of support staff, representatives of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and an Independent Chairperson.

The department is also continuing to engage with the recognised support staff trade unions and other stakeholders, including on the design of the SSSNB.

The SSSNB will play an important role in supporting the department's work to drive high and rising standards in education and ensuring we give all children the best possible life chances.

## ■ Schools: Coventry

**Damian Hinds:**

**[15416]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the level of (a) demand and (b) supply for Year 7 places in each Planning Area in Coventry in September 2025.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Information on the latest school place planning estimates are published at year group and planning area level in the annual School Capacity statistics publication, which is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-capacity>.

The information requested can be accessed at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/data-set/b12c3f30-c22c-4b88-b5b2-2c1848981b4e>. The data includes local authority pupil forecasts (demand), estimated future capacity (supply), and an estimated number of additional places needed or surplus places. These estimates reflect the position reported by local authorities as at May 2023 through the School Capacity survey, supplemented with the department's internal data on central programmes, which will add or remove school places.

## ■ Schools: Finance

**Andrew Cooper:**

**[15381]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the guidance issued to local education authorities on funding schools for in-year (a) transfers of pupils and (b) growth in pupils on roll.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

The department has allocated £242 million in Growth and Falling Rolls funding to local authorities in 2024/25 through the dedicated schools grant, which local authorities can use to support schools managing significant growth in pupil numbers. We allocate this funding to local authorities based on the actual growth in pupil numbers they experienced the previous year.

The department publishes guidance on the operation of growth funding at a local level, which sets out mandatory minimum requirements for local authorities in the use of this funding. This guidance is reviewed each year. The guidance for 2024/25 is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2024-to-2025/growth-and-falling-rolls-fund-guidance-2024-to-2025>.

The mobility factor in the schools national funding formula (NFF) also provides funding to local authorities to support schools with high levels of pupil mobility. This factor allocates funding to schools with a high proportion of pupils who have an entry date in the last three years which is not typical. In most cases this would be where a pupil's first recorded appearance on the school's roll was other than the October census.

In addition, the department publishes guidance for local authorities on the funding arrangements relating to pupils who are permanently excluded from one school and then move to another school. This guidance is within the Schools Funding Operational Guidance, which is also updated each year. The 2024/25 guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2024-to-2025/schools-operational-guide-2024-to-2025>.

## ■ Schools: Greater Manchester

**Damian Hinds:**

[15415]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the level of (a) demand and (b) supply for Year 7 places in the (i) Salford - South, (ii) Trafford - Sale, (iii) Manchester - South and (iv) Stockport - East & South Planning Areas in September 2025.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

Information on the latest school place planning estimates are published at year group and planning area level in the annual School Capacity statistics publication, which is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-capacity>.

The information requested can be accessed at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/data-set/b12c3f30-c22c-4b88-b5b2-2c1848981b4e>. The data includes local authority pupil forecasts (demand), estimated future capacity (supply), and an estimated number of additional places needed or surplus places. These estimates reflect the position reported by local authorities as at May 2023 through the School Capacity survey, supplemented with the department's internal data on central programmes which will add or remove school places.

## ■ Special Educational Needs

**Paul Davies:**

[15357]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the commissioning of local children services to ensure that every young person with SEND has access to (a) timely and (b) quality transition support.

**Paul Davies:**

[15358]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the national standards underpinning transitional support provided to young people with SEND.



**Catherine McKinnell:**

For too long the education and care system has not met the needs of all children and young people, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with parents struggling to get their children the support they need and deserve.

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with SEND receive the right support to succeed in their education and develop the skills they need as they move into adult life. We are committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream settings, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs, restoring parents' trust that their child will get the support they need.

The department is working closely with experts on reforms and recently appointed Dame Christine Lenehan as Strategic Advisor for SEND. Dame Christine will play a key role in convening and engaging with the sector, including leaders, practitioners, children and families, as the department considers the next steps for the future of SEND reform.

Successful transitions must be well-planned. Poor support for and around transitions was a clear theme in the issues raised when the previous government consulted on the SEND and alternative provision green paper of March 2022.

All local authorities must set out the support available to help children and young people with SEND prepare for and transition to adulthood as part of their local offer. This should be co-produced with children, young people, and their families to ensure it meets local needs.

For children and young people with an education, health, and care (EHC) plan, there must be a focus from year 9 onwards on preparing the young person for adulthood as part of their plan's annual review. This focus must continue until the young person's EHC plan ceases. Planning for the transition to adulthood should result in clear outcomes being agreed that are ambitious and stretching, and which are tailored to the needs and interests of the young person.

Ofsted undertook a thematic review into 'Preparation for Adulthood' this year to find out the extent to which local area partners are working together effectively to prepare children and young people with SEND for adulthood. The report's findings are expected to be published soon.

**■ Special Educational Needs: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole****Tom Hayes:**[\[15342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to improve collaboration between local authorities and multi-academy trusts in the delivery of SEND education in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council area.

**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. This work forms part of the government's Opportunity Mission, which will break the unfair link between background and opportunity, starting with giving every child, including those with SEND, the best start in life.

Excellence exists in all parts of our school system, and this government believes schools can perform best when they collaborate with each other and with their local community. That is why, in the King's Speech, the government committed to legislating on requiring all schools to cooperate with their local authorities on issues such as school inclusion and place planning.

This government wants to work with all parts of our school system so that together we can ensure there is strong partnership and high quality collaboration, especially around the sharing of expertise and good practice, that helps deliver an exceptional education for children and young people with SEND. I expect all schools, regardless of type, to support each other, to drive a self-improving system.

Departmental officials work closely with both Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole local authority and academy trusts to bring all parts of the system together. The department will continue with its work with the local area to ensure that they deliver further improvements in services.

#### ■ **Special Educational Needs: Down's Syndrome**

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[15281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help children with Down's syndrome attend mainstream schools.

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[15287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support teachers of pupils with Down's syndrome in mainstream schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

This 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.

The department is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs, restoring parents' trust that their child will get the support they need. This includes strengthening accountability for inclusivity, including through Ofsted, and encouraging schools to set up Resourced Provision or special educational needs units to increase capacity in mainstream schools.

High-quality teaching is central to ensuring that all pupils, including those with Down's Syndrome or other types of SEND, are given the best possible opportunity to achieve. The department is committed to recruiting an additional 6,500 new expert teachers over the course of this parliament. To support all teachers, the department is implementing a range of teacher training reforms to ensure teachers have the skills

to support all pupils to succeed, including those with SEND. On 1 September 2024, the government introduced a new mandatory leadership level qualification for special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs). The qualification will play a key role in improving outcomes for pupils with SEND, including Down's Syndrome, by ensuring SENCOs consistently receive high-quality, evidence-based training on how best to support children with SEND.

This government is also providing almost £1 billion more for high needs budgets in the 2025/26 financial year, bringing total high needs funding to £11.9 billion. This funding will help local authorities and schools with the increasing costs of supporting children and young people with SEND.

### ■ **Special Educational Needs: Young People**

**Paul Davies:**

[\[15359\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure young people with SEND develop real skills for life.

**Catherine McKinnell:**

For too long the education and care system has not met the needs of all children and young people, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with parents struggling to get their children the support they need and deserve.

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with SEND receive the right support to succeed in their education and develop the skills they need as they move into adult life. We are committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream settings, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs, restoring parents' trust that their child will get the support they need.

As part of our commitment to helping children and young people with SEND to develop the skills they need as they move into adult life, the department is investing up to £18 million until 2025 to build capacity in supported internships. We aim to double the number of internships each year to around 4,500, to support more young people with education, health and care (EHC) plans to gain the skills to transition into employment.

The SEND code of practice is clear that all children and young people with SEND should be prepared for adulthood. This includes supporting children and young people to develop independence, contribute to their community, develop positive friendships, be as healthy as possible and, for the majority of young people, prepare them for higher education and/or employment.

For those with an EHC plan, there must be a focus from year 9 onwards on preparing the young person for adulthood as part of their plan's annual review. This focus must continue until the young person's EHC plan ceases. Planning for the transition to adulthood should result in clear outcomes being agreed that are ambitious and stretching, and which are tailored to the needs and interests of the young person.

Ofsted undertook a thematic review into 'Preparation for Adulthood' this year to find out the extent to which local area partners are working together effectively to prepare children and young people with SEND for adulthood. The report's findings are expected to be available soon.

### ■ Students: Disadvantaged

**Uma Kumaran:** [\[15560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of support available for students from low-income families.

**Uma Kumaran:** [\[15561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to (a) reintroduce maintenance grants and (b) another scheme to support students from low income families with the cost of living.

**Janet Daby:**

The government recognises the impact that the cost of living crisis has had on students. That is why we are increasing maximum loans for living costs for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, in line with the forecast rate of inflation based on the RPI All Items Excl Mortgage Interest (RPIX) inflation measure, to ensure more support is targeted at students from the lowest income families. In addition, vulnerable groups of students eligible for benefits, such as lone parents and some disabled students, qualify for higher rates of loans for living costs.

The department publishes an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) each year which sets out the impact of changes to student support on students with protected characteristics and from disadvantaged groups. We plan to publish an EIA for the 2025/26 academic year early in 2025.

There is much more to do to expand access and improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. That is why we have announced that we expect the higher education (HE) sector to do more to support students by working with the government and the Office for Students, and by making the most of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

The government's longer term plan for HE reform will be set out by summer 2025.

### ■ Students: Loans

**Uma Kumaran:** [\[15559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a stepped repayment structure for student loan repayment plans.

**Janet Daby:**

The department is determined that the higher education (HE) funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities and for students. The government is

committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university.

The department will set out this government's longer term plan for HE reform by summer 2025.

### ■ **T-levels: Havering**

**Andrew Rosindell:**

[\[14927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to help increase the number of pupils taking T-Level courses in (a) Romford constituency and (b) Havering.

**Janet Daby:**

This government wants every young person to be able to pursue the post-16 education and training pathway that sets them up with the skills to achieve, including ensuring that more young people have access to the opportunities T Levels provide. 21 T Levels are now available and the department has introduced three new subjects this academic year, with a further T Level planned for September 2025.

Over 250 providers across the country deliver T Levels, including Barking and Dagenham College in the Romford area, which is now offering six T Levels, and New City College, which is offering seven T Levels. Both colleges have benefited from capital funding to support the development of industry standard facilities and equipment for T Level students in the area.

T Levels are promoted to young people via the department's national 'Skills for Life' communications campaign, supported by regional PR and partnership work with organisations such as Snapchat and UCAS. Schools can also access face to face support from advisers who offer information on T Levels to support students' and teachers' understanding of the opportunities they provide.

The department's annual T Levels Week will take place from 2 to 6 December this year and will see providers, employers and the department's 800 member-strong T Level ambassador network sharing student stories to raise the profile of T Levels and drive-up student demand across the country.

### ■ **Turing Scheme: Private Education**

**Chi Onwurah:**

[\[16155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of (a) schools that have students with Turing grants are independent schools and (b) students that receive Turing grants attend independent schools.

**Stephen Morgan:**

For the 2024/25 academic year, over £10 million in funding was awarded to 298 successful schools projects from across the UK. This will provide funding for over 7,000 pupils to participate in placements overseas. Of these, 56% will be for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Of these 298 successful school applications, 6 were from private schools (2%), providing funding for just over 100 pupils to take part in international placements (1.6%), however this is subject to change as these projects are delivered through the year.

## ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

### ■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Consultants

**Dan Carden:** [\[15521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much his Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Michael Shanks:**

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) was created in February 2023, so no information is held for periods prior to that date.

The Departments spend on Consultancy Fees in financial year 23/24 can be found in the 2023/24 Annual Report, available [here](#).

### ■ Energy: Billing

**Pippa Heylings:** [\[15326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with energy suppliers on providing additional support for households with energy bills in winter 2024-25.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The Government and industry have worked together to deliver a £500m Winter Support Commitment for customers, and we applaud suppliers stepping up on this matter. I also meet regularly with energy suppliers to outline the Government's expectations of the standard of service that should be provided to their customers, including supporting vulnerable consumers and those struggling to pay their bills this winter.

Additional energy suppliers are delivering Government support this winter through the Warm Home Discount, providing an annual £150 rebate off energy bills for eligible low-income households.

As part of its Warm Homes Plan, the Government have committed an initial £3.4 billion over the next 3 years towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency.

At the Autumn Budget 2024, my Rt Hon Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that an additional £1 billion, including Barnett impact, will be invested to extend the Household Support Fund (HSF) in England until 31 March 2026, and to maintain Discretionary Housing Payments in England and Wales. This builds on the previous commitment of £421 million in England to extend the HSF until 31 March 2025.

## ■ Energy: Housing

**Pippa Heylings:**

[15324]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to improve the energy efficiency of homes for winter 2024-25.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

There are multiple targeted schemes in place to deliver energy efficiency measures to low income and fuel poor households. Current schemes include the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), the Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS), the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), and the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG).

For this winter, support is also available through the Warm Home Discount scheme which provides eligible low-income households across Great Britain with a £150 rebate off their winter energy bill.

## ■ Energy: Prices

**Mr Lee Dillon:**

[15544]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with energy suppliers on continuing the Voluntary Debt Commitment after winter 2023-24.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

My Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have had regular discussions with suppliers on a range of issues, including the Voluntary Debt Commitment. Following these discussions, the Government and industry have worked together to deliver a £500m Winter Support Commitment for customers, and we applaud suppliers stepping up on this matter.

## ■ Fuel Poverty: Lincolnshire

**Sir John Hayes:**

[15166]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent estimate he has made of the number of households in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire in fuel poverty.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The latest statistics for the number of households in fuel poverty in 2022 in administrative areas and parliamentary constituencies in England can be found in the published sub-regional fuel poverty statistics, in Tables 2 and 4:

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

## ■ Fuel Poverty: Norfolk

**Ben Goldsborough:**

[15556]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent estimate he has made of the number of households that are in fuel poverty in (a) South Norfolk constituency and (b) Norfolk.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

The latest statistics for the number of households in fuel poverty in 2022 in administrative areas and parliamentary constituencies in England can be found in the published sub-regional fuel poverty statistics, in Tables 2 and 4:

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

**Hydrogen****Sir Alec Shelbrooke:****[15422]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of developing a dedicated hydrogen pipeline across Great Britain.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Government is assessing hydrogen pipeline transport options, including the possibility of a core network, in its strategic planning of hydrogen transport infrastructure. Hydrogen transport will be critical to the development of the hydrogen economy and to meeting our net zero ambitions and carbon budgets. The hydrogen economy will also unlock economic benefits and increase energy security and resilience. In December 2023, Government published its ambition for the first allocation round of the hydrogen transport and storage business models to support up to two storage projects at scale and associated regional pipeline infrastructure to be in operation or construction by 2030.

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke:****[15431]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of hydrogen blending to (a) decrease hydrogen production costs, (b) decrease wind curtailment costs, (c) scale hydrogen production and (d) align with EU plans to blend hydrogen into gas transmission pipelines.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Government remains committed to examining the case for hydrogen blending and is reviewing plans. This work aims to gather evidence on the feasibility, costs and benefits of hydrogen blending that can inform decisions on its potential role.

**Sir Alec Shelbrooke:****[15433]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the Health and Safety Executive's evaluation of the safety case for blending hydrogen in the transmission network.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Government remains committed to examining the case for hydrogen blending and is reviewing plans. This work aims to gather evidence on the feasibility, costs and benefits of hydrogen blending that can inform decisions on its potential role.



**Sir Alec Shelbrooke:**

[\[15434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when he plans to publish his decision on whether to allow hydrogen blending into the gas transmission network.

**Sarah Jones:**

The Government remains committed to examining the case for hydrogen blending and is reviewing plans. This work aims to gather evidence on the feasibility, costs and benefits of hydrogen blending that can inform decisions on its potential role.

## ■ **Insulation: Housing**

**Pippa Heylings:**

[\[15325\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to provide vulnerable households with emergency home insulation in winter 2024-25.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

We recently announced the next steps on our Warm Homes Plan, which will see 300,000 homes upgraded in the next year.

The government has committed an initial £3.4 billion over the next 3 years towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency, through the Warm Homes Plan. With £1 billion of this allocated to next year.

Our ambitious Plan will upgrade five million homes by investing in insulation and other improvements such as solar panels, batteries and low carbon heating, helping to make them cheaper and cleaner to run.

## ■ **Mortgages: Energy Performance Certificates**

**Andrew Cooper:**

[\[15382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring mortgage providers to reflect the EPC rating of properties in their mortgage rate offers to consumers.

**Miatta Fahnbulleh:**

*The pricing of mortgages is a commercial decision for lenders. Currently the market provides a range of products such as green mortgages that can offer reduced rates or cashback for borrowers where certain conditions are met.*

*Any borrower seeking one of these products should speak to a mortgage broker, who will be able to assist them in finding the best possible product for their circumstances.*

*As part of the Warm Homes Plan, Government is exploring options for working with lenders to further scale up and diversify the private green finance options available to homeowners to support low carbon heating and energy efficiency retrofit.*

## ■ National Grid

**James Cartlidge:**

**[16211]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an estimate of the cost of building (a) the Western link and (b) all current and future stages of the Eastern Link if that route was primarily overland via pylons instead of offshore cabling.

**Michael Shanks:**

Ofgem reviews proposed project costs and ensures that network companies spend efficiently. Electricity network reinforcements are only approved where they are in the interests of consumers and help reduce system costs.

Ofgem identified a net lifetime benefit for Western Link, due to lower project and constraint costs compared to alternatives. [1] The system operator set out the project need case in 2007.

Ofgem's analysis [2]of Eastern Green Link 1 and 2, noted that onshore reinforcements would not achieve required delivery dates resulting in increased constraint costs.

[1]<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/consultation/transmission-investment-incentives-consultation-minded-position-western-high-voltage-direct-current-hvdc-link-western-bootstrap>

[2]<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/consultation/eastern-hvdc-consultation-projects-initial-needs-case-and-initial-thinking-its-suitability-competition>

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### ■ Electronic Cigarettes: Waste Disposal

**Dr Caroline Johnson:**

**[15784]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what information his Department holds on the number of vape (a) distributors, (b) importers, (c) manufacturers and (d) producers that are registered with (i) the Environment Agency and (ii) a producer compliance scheme under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations (WEEE) 2013.

**Mary Creagh:**

The Environment Agency maintains a public register of registered producers and approved compliance schemes under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations 2013. There are currently 34 registered vape producers in the UK.

## ■ Plants: Import Controls

**Manuela Perteghella:**

[\[14723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of (a) levels of risk and (b) rates of checks on plants at the UK border.

**Daniel Zeichner:**

An enhanced risk-based approach is already undertaken at the UK border, where regulated plants and plant products have been categorised into high, medium, and low risk categories. The principle of risk-based controls, as previously applied under the EU regime, remains unchanged, but the GB regime now focuses on risks to Great Britain, rather than risks to the EU. Controls are then appropriately weighted against the risks posed – so the higher the risk category of a plant or plant product, the more biosecurity assurances we need, in the form of import controls. There are also plants and plant products which are not regulated at all, and those that are prohibited entirely.

We undertake systematic, proactive screening of plant health risks. Risks are reviewed monthly by an expert group and Ministers, and prioritised for actions such as surveillance, enhanced inspection, regulation, national measures, import controls, research and awareness raising.

Ensuring the most appropriate risk categorisation and rate of inspection is important, from a biosecurity perspective, but also to avoid unnecessary disruption to our critical supply chains and ports. Risk categorisation will remain dynamic and Defra will monitor import and interception data and Inspection rates may change in response to changes in risk, for example, an upsurge of interceptions of pests or a new threat emerging.

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### ■ Embassies: St Andrew's Day

**Stephen Gethins:**

[\[16234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what events to mark St Andrew's day are taking place in UK embassies.

**Catherine West:**

UK missions facilitate St Andrews's Day celebrations in a range of innovative ways, tailoring their support to both host-nation and Scottish diaspora interests. 2024 examples include: the Paris Embassy hosting a Reception, attended by the Deputy First Minister of Scotland; the Ottawa High Commission jointly hosting a reception with Scottish Government colleagues; and in Kyiv, activities highlighting Ukraine-Scotland connections - including their sharing St Andrew as the national patron saint. In Singapore, FCDO officials will support the Secretary of State for Scotland's

attendance as guest of honour at an event attended by 450 guests from the business and Scottish diaspora community.

## ■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Consultants

**Dan Carden:** [\[15519\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much his Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Catherine West:**

Per the annual report and accounts published figures, the FCDO has spent the following amounts on consultancy fees since 2021:

- £2.7 million in 20/21
- £5.8 million in 21/22
- £4.3 million in 22/23
- £3.5 million in 23/24
- The reporting for the current financial year, Apr 2024 to Mar 2025, is not available and will be published in due course in 2025.

The Government is committed to restoring the public finances and delivering value for the taxpayer. As part of this wider mission, the Government has pledged to reduce wasteful spend on non-essential and expensive consultants in order to save over £1.2 billion by 2026.

## ■ Hamas: Hostage Taking

**Richard Tice:** [\[14791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what (a) diplomatic and (b) operational steps his Department has taken to help secure the release of (i) Emily Damari and (ii) other hostages held by Hamas in the last three months; how many (A) instances of direct engagement and (B) negotiations involving UK officials have taken place in this period; and what measurable outcomes he can provide to demonstrate progress in this area.

**Mr Hamish Falconer:**

We have consistently supported hostage talks, and continue to work alongside our allies and partners in the region, exercising every possible diplomatic lever to see the hostages immediately and unconditionally released. Negotiations remain the best chance to get hostages home to their loved ones, and we call on all parties to return to the negotiating table. It is utterly appalling that hostages taken by Hamas terrorists on 7 October are still being held captive, including one British national, Emily Damari, and three other hostages with strong British links. In support of the ongoing hostage rescue activity, the UK Ministry of Defence conducts surveillance flights over the Eastern Mediterranean, including operating in airspace over Israel and Gaza.

Surveillance aircraft are unarmed, do not have a combat role and are tasked solely to locate hostages.

## ■ Religious Freedom

**Preet Kaur Gill:**

[\[15530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to promote (a) internet freedom and (b) access to information to advocate freedom of religion internationally.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

The UK is committed to media freedom, and advocating freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). The UK is a member of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), a partnership of 41 governments, co-ordinating diplomatic efforts and engaging with civil society and private sectors to support Internet freedom. We co-chaired the FOC's Task Force on Internet Shutdowns for the past two years. We also co-hosted the International Day for Universal Access to Information with UNESCO, in 2023. Internet freedom and access to information are important enablers of democracy and human rights, including the right to FoRB. We continue to promote FoRB internationally, by coordinating with partners at fora such as the UN, and bilaterally through our diplomatic network.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Children

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[15653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of delays in ADHD assessments on children.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We recognise the importance of early identification and timely diagnosis of neurodevelopmental conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), so that an individual's needs can be identified sooner, and so that appropriate health, social care, and education interventions, advice, and support can be offered.

It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available the appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including ADHD services, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines. This includes support for children and young people whilst waiting for an assessment.

We are supporting an independent cross-sector taskforce that NHS England has established to look at ADHD service provision and its impact on patient experience. The taskforce is bringing together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the National Health Service, education, and justice, to better understand the

challenges affecting people with ADHD, including timely access to services and support. The ADHD taskforce will also work closely with the Department for Education's neurodivergence task and finish group.

### ■ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Halton

**Mike Amesbury:** [\[15652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of waiting times for ADHD assessments in Halton.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

There is, at present, no single, established dataset that can be used to monitor waiting times for the assessment and diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) nationally, or for individual organisations or geographies in England. Although the data requested is not held centrally, it may be held locally by individual National Health Service trusts or commissioners.

We are supporting a taskforce that NHS England has established to look at ADHD service provision and its impact on patient experience. The taskforce is bringing together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the NHS, education, and justice, to better understand the challenges affecting people with ADHD, including timely access to services and support.

Alongside the work of the taskforce, NHS England will continue to develop a national ADHD data improvement plan, carry out more detailed work to understand the provider and commissioning landscape, and capture examples from local health systems which are trialling innovative ways of delivering ADHD services, to ensure best practice is captured and shared across the system.

### ■ Autism: Health Services

**Alex Sobel:** [\[15778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to support (a) people diagnosed with pathological demand avoidance and (b) their carers.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is most often understood as a characteristic experienced by or observed, or both, in some autistic people, but professional consensus on its status is still required. PDA is not a recognised and stand-alone diagnosis within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or the International Classification of Disease.

It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including support for autistic people, in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.

The NICE guideline, Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis, recommends that as part of autism assessments, healthcare workers should consider PDA and carry out appropriate referrals.

In respect of carers, the Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to deliver a wide range of sustainable, high-quality care and support services, including support for carers. Local authorities are required to undertake Carer's Assessments to support people caring for their family and friends who appear to have a need for support, and to meet their eligible needs on request from them.

## ■ **Breast Cancer: Diagnosis**

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**

[\[15780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the rate of breast cancer diagnoses for women with asymptomatic breast density.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**

[\[15781\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of including breast density in medical data collection, in the context of diagnosing breast cancer.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The UK National Screening Committee is currently reviewing the evidence surrounding breast density in screening.

Improving early diagnosis of cancer, including breast cancer, is a priority for NHS England. To support early detection and diagnosis, the National Health Service carries out approximately 2.1 million breast cancer screens each year in hospitals and mobile screening vans, usually in convenient community locations.

## ■ **Charities: Employers' Contributions**

**Helen Grant:**

[\[14452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of an increase in employers national insurance contributions on charity and not for profit providers of adult social care; and if he will publish this information.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The Government considered the cost pressures facing adult social care as part of the wider consideration of local government spending within the Spending Review process. This assessment took into account a wide range of factors, including changes to employer National Insurance contributions, and the National Living Wage increases.

In response to the range of pressures facing local authorities, the Government is providing a real-terms uplift to core local government spending power of approximately 3.2%, which includes £1.3 billion of new grant funding in 2025/26.

## ■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

**Kim Leadbeater:** [15686]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of including people with learning disabilities in the spring Covid-19 booster vaccination programme.

**Andrew Gwynne:**

The Government is committed to protecting those most vulnerable to COVID-19 through vaccination, as guided by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). On 13 November 2024, the JCVI published advice on the COVID-19 vaccination programme, covering vaccination in 2025 and spring 2026. This advice is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-in-2025-and-spring-2026-jcvi-advice/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-in-2025-and-spring-2026>

The Government is considering this advice carefully and will respond in due course.

## ■ Dental Services

**Andy McDonald:** [15769]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the registration rate per NHS dentist was in each (a) integrated care board and (b) local authority area in England in each year since 2010.

**Andy McDonald:** [15771]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many individuals were registered with an NHS dentist in the (a) Middlesbrough and (b) Stockton-on-Tees local authority area in each year since 2010.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The information requested is not held centrally. Patients in England are not registered with a National Health Service dental practice, although many NHS dental practices do tend to see patients regularly. There is no geographical restriction on which practice a patient may attend. Some dental practices may operate local waiting list arrangements.

NHS dentists are required to keep their NHS.UK website profiles up to date so that patients can find a dentist more easily. This includes information on whether they are accepting new patients. Further information is available at the following link:

[www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist)

## ■ Dental Services: Grimsby

**Melanie Onn:** [15213]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason his Department withdrew the NHS contract from the Waltham Dentist Practice; and what assessment he



has made of the potential impact of that withdrawal on the provision of NHS dental appointments.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 26 November 2024]:* The decision to terminate the contract for the provision of National Health Service dental services with Waltham Dentist Practice was taken by NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) as a contractual matter. We cannot comment further due to commercial sensitivity.

The funding from this contract remains allocated to dental services in the region and the ICB is engaging with other dental practices in the area to find solutions for NHS patients to access treatment with alternative providers.

■ **Dental Services: Tees Valley**

**Andy McDonald:**

[\[15770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many registered dentists were serving NHS patients in the (a) Middlesbrough and (b) Stockton-on-Tees local authority area in each year since 2010.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We do not hold data on the number of dentists who have delivered some National Health Service treatment each year at a local authority level. We have therefore provided data on the number of dentists who delivered NHS care in the Northeast and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), which is the ICB for both local authorities. The following table shows the number of dentists who delivered some NHS dental care each year in the Northeast and North Cumbria ICB, from 2011/12 to 2023/24:

| YEAR    | TOTAL REGISTERED DENTISTS |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 2011/12 | 1,400                     |
| 2012/13 | 1,420                     |
| 2013/14 | 1,531                     |
| 2014/15 | 1,518                     |
| 2015/16 | 1,523                     |
| 2016/17 | 1,713                     |
| 2017/18 | 1,723                     |
| 2018/19 | 1,760                     |
| 2019/20 | 1,491                     |
| 2020/21 | 1,418                     |

| YEAR    | TOTAL REGISTERED DENTISTS |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 2021/22 | 1,426                     |
| 2022/23 | 1,387                     |
| 2023/24 | 1,349                     |

Source: the figures from 2019 to 2024 are published by the NHS Business Services Authority, and the figures prior to 2019 were published by NHS Digital, and both are available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics>

Note: the figures from the two different data sources are not directly comparable, and caution should be taken when comparing pre and post 2019 figures.

**Andy McDonald:**

**[15772]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many individuals were seen by an NHS dentist in the (a) Middlesbrough and (b) Stockton-on-Tees local authority area in each year since 2010.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The following table shows the number of unique adult patients seen by a National Health Service dentist in the Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees local authority areas, in the 24 months to June, each year from 2013 to 2024:

| YEAR | STOCKTON-ON-TEES | MIDDLESBOROUGH |
|------|------------------|----------------|
| 2013 | 90,843           | 70,962         |
| 2014 | 89,499           | 70,394         |
| 2015 | 88,279           | 70,055         |
| 2016 | 88,392           | 73,350         |
| 2017 | 87,803           | 73,490         |
| 2018 | 86,589           | 73,100         |
| 2019 | 85,859           | 56,729         |
| 2020 | 81,507           | 52,893         |
| 2021 | 74,718           | 44,770         |
| 2022 | 69,797           | 38,516         |
| 2023 | 75,805           | 42,998         |

| YEAR | STOCKTON-ON-TEES | MIDDLESBOROUGH |
|------|------------------|----------------|
| 2024 | 73,483           | 45,287         |

Source: figures prior to 2019 were published by NHS Digital, and are available at the following link: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics>

Note: the figures from the two different data sources are not directly comparable, and caution should be taken when comparing pre and post 2019 figures.

The following table shows the number of unique child patients seen by an NHS dentist in the Middlesborough and Stockton-on-Tees local authority areas, in the 12 months to June, each year from 2013 to 2024:

| YEAR | STOCKTON-ON-TEES | MIDDLESBOROUGH |
|------|------------------|----------------|
| 2013 | 33,105           | 25,002         |
| 2014 | 32,611           | 25,312         |
| 2015 | 32,648           | 25,720         |
| 2016 | 28,006           | 22,755         |
| 2017 | 28,481           | 22,608         |
| 2018 | 28,754           | 22,673         |
| 2019 | 26,859           | 17,892         |
| 2020 | 25,413           | 15,617         |
| 2021 | 17,131           | 8,166          |
| 2022 | 24,044           | 13,579         |
| 2023 | 25,667           | 16,231         |
| 2024 | 27,288           | 17,520         |

Source: figures prior to 2019 were published by NHS Digital, and are available at the following link: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics>

Note: the figures from the two different data sources are not directly comparable, and caution should be taken when comparing pre and post 2019 figures.

In addition, the attached tables show the number of courses of treatment delivered by an NHS dentist in the Middlesborough and Stockton-on-Tees local authorities, respectively, broken down by band, from 2013/14 to 2023/24.

We do not hold local authority level data for the number of adults and children seen prior to 2013, or for the courses of treatment prior to 2013/14. The most recent data has been published by NHS Business Services Authority, and is available at the following link:

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

**Attachments:**

1. [PQ15772 - Supplementary tables](#) [PQ15772 - Table.docx]

**Andy McDonald:**

**[15773]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many courses of dental treatment were delivered by an NHS dentist in the (a) Middlesbrough and (b) Stockton-on-Tees local authority area in each year since 2010 by treatment band.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The following table shows the number of unique adult patients seen by a National Health Service dentist in the Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees local authority areas, in the 24 months to June, each year from 2013 to 2024:

| YEAR | STOCKTON-ON-TEES | MIDDLESBOROUGH |
|------|------------------|----------------|
| 2013 | 90,843           | 70,962         |
| 2014 | 89,499           | 70,394         |
| 2015 | 88,279           | 70,055         |
| 2016 | 88,392           | 73,350         |
| 2017 | 87,803           | 73,490         |
| 2018 | 86,589           | 73,100         |
| 2019 | 85,859           | 56,729         |
| 2020 | 81,507           | 52,893         |
| 2021 | 74,718           | 44,770         |
| 2022 | 69,797           | 38,516         |
| 2023 | 75,805           | 42,998         |
| 2024 | 73,483           | 45,287         |

Source: figures prior to 2019 were published by NHS Digital, and are available at the following link: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics>

Note: the figures from the two different data sources are not directly comparable, and caution should be taken when comparing pre and post 2019 figures.

The following table shows the number of unique child patients seen by an NHS dentist in the Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees local authority areas, in the 12 months to June, each year from 2013 to 2024:

| YEAR | STOCKTON-ON-TEES | MIDDLESBOROUGH |
|------|------------------|----------------|
| 2013 | 33,105           | 25,002         |
| 2014 | 32,611           | 25,312         |
| 2015 | 32,648           | 25,720         |
| 2016 | 28,006           | 22,755         |
| 2017 | 28,481           | 22,608         |
| 2018 | 28,754           | 22,673         |
| 2019 | 26,859           | 17,892         |
| 2020 | 25,413           | 15,617         |
| 2021 | 17,131           | 8,166          |
| 2022 | 24,044           | 13,579         |
| 2023 | 25,667           | 16,231         |
| 2024 | 27,288           | 17,520         |

Source: figures prior to 2019 were published by NHS Digital, and are available at the following link: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics>

Note: the figures from the two different data sources are not directly comparable, and caution should be taken when comparing pre and post 2019 figures.

In addition, the attached tables show the number of courses of treatment delivered by an NHS dentist in the Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees local authorities, respectively, broken down by band, from 2013/14 to 2023/24.

We do not hold local authority level data for the number of adults and children seen prior to 2013, or for the courses of treatment prior to 2013/14. The most recent data has been published by NHS Business Services Authority, and is available at the following link:

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

**Attachments:**

1. [PQ15773 - Supplementary tables](#) [PQ15772 - Table.docx]

## ■ Department of Health and Social Care: Consultants

**Dan Carden:** [\[15512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much his Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Karin Smyth:**

The following table shows the amount the Department spent on consultancy fees, each year since 2021:

| YEAR  | 2022/23    | 2021/22      | 2020/21      |
|-------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Spend | £4,092,000 | £252,815,000 | £188,978,000 |

Source: the Department's Annual Report and Accounts within the Accountability Report, in the table on expenditure on Consultancy, Agency and Temporary workers.

The value for 2020/21 has been amended from previous Parliamentary Questions as a prior year adjustment for 2020/21 was reflected in the 2021/22 Annual Report and Accounts to account for £17,365,000 for the vaccine taskforce, which was transferred from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, amending the value for 2020/21 from £171,613,000 to £188,978,000. The table excludes the date for 2023/24. Fully audited figures for 2023/24 will be available upon the publication of the Department's Annual Report and Accounts later this year.

## ■ General Practitioners

**Mike Martin:** [\[15982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the last time a GP surgery was set up from scratch in England was.

**Mike Martin:** [\[15983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the last time a GP surgery was set up from scratch in Kent was.

**Mike Martin:** [\[16047\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what was the name of the last GP surgery set up in Tunbridge Wells constituency; and when that surgery was set up.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Information regarding the name and date of establishment for the latest GP surgery set up in England, Tunbridge Wells constituency, and Kent is as follows:

- The last GP surgery set up in England was Solent NHS Trust T/A Medina Healthcare, which was created on 4 th September 2024.

- The last GP surgery set up in Tunbridge Wells constituency was Lonsdale Medical Centre, which was created on 1 st May 1991.
- The last GP surgery set up in Kent was Bromleag Care Practice, which was created on 1 st April 2019.

To note:

The data included has been taken from [GP and GP practice related data - NHS England Digital](#) (file epracur.csv), and is labelled 'GP Practices', however this is not entirely accurate as it comes from NHS Prescribing Services and identifies cost centre codes for prescribing activity. This data wasn't created to list GP Practices; instead, it's meant to track prescribing activity and pay dispensing contractors. It has since been used as a reference for IT systems operations.

## ■ General Practitioners: Kent

**Mike Martin:**

[\[16381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the amount of funding received by the most recently-established independent NHS GP surgery in Kent.

**Mike Martin:**

[\[16410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much funding his Department allocated to the most recently established independent NHS GP surgery in (a) Tunbridge Wells constituency and (b) England.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Data regarding the amount of funding received by the most recently established independent National Health Service general practice (GP) surgery in Kent, the Tunbridge Wells constituency, and England, is as follows:

- the last GP surgery set up in Kent was the Bromleag Care Practice, which was created on 1 April 2019, and the total NHS payments to this practice, minus deductions, in 2022/23 was £5,317,351;
- the last GP surgery set up in the Tunbridge Wells constituency was the Lonsdale Medical Centre, which was created on 1 May 1991, and the total NHS payments to this practice, minus deductions, in 2022/23 was £898,629; and
- the last GP surgery set up in England was the Solent NHS Trust T/A Medina Healthcare, which was created on 4 September 2024, and we have no data for this practice, as the 2022/23 data only covers practices up to 31 March 2023.

It should be noted that the latest data we have available relating to these requests is published data for NHS Payment to GP Practices for 2022/23, which is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-payments-to-general-practice/england-2022-23>

The data can be found in Table 2 of Annex 1 Tables and Charts on this page. The totals columns are available on the far right of Table 2.

NHS Payments to General Practice, England 2022/23 provides information on NHS payments to individual providers of GP services in England. Figures are given for the main payment categories, which include Global Sum, the Balance of Primary Medical Services expenditure, the Quality Outcomes Framework, and Local Incentive Schemes.

It is not a record of the amount of money available for direct patient care, nor the total invested in patient care through GPs. Instead, it constitutes the majority of actual monies paid to practices for all activities and costs during the 2022/23 financial year.

## ■ Health Services: Rural Areas

**Sir Geoffrey Cox:** [\[15741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help support (a) GP surgeries, (b) dentists, (c) pharmacies and (d) care homes in rural areas to tackle workforce pressures, in the context of changes to the level of employer National Insurance contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, and this enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The employer National Insurance rise will be implemented April 2025, and the Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year in due course.

## ■ Hormone Replacement Therapy

**Jim Shannon:** [\[15181\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many women have been newly prescribed hormone replacement therapy in the last 12 months.

**Karin Smyth:**

The NHS Business Services Authority does not hold data relating to the number of women who have been newly prescribed hormone replacement therapy (HRT) products in the last 12 months. However, the available data does indicate that the estimated number of identified patients who were prescribed at least one HRT drug item in England increased by 12%, from 2.3 million in 2022/23 to 2.6 million in 2023/24. Further information is available at the following link:

[https://nhsbsa-opendata.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/hrt/hrt\\_June\\_2024\\_v001.html](https://nhsbsa-opendata.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/hrt/hrt_June_2024_v001.html)



## ■ Hospices: Finance

**Danny Beales:**

[\[15536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the sustainability of the funding model for the hospice sector.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Palliative care services are included in the list of services an integrated care board (ICB) must commission. This promotes a more consistent national approach and supports commissioners in prioritising palliative and end of life care. To support ICBs in this duty, NHS England has published statutory guidance and service specifications.

Whilst the majority of palliative and end of life care is provided by National Health Service staff and services, we recognise the vital part that voluntary sector organisations, including hospices, also play in providing support to people at end of life and their loved ones.

The amount of funding each charitable hospice receives varies both within and between ICB areas. This will vary depending on demand in that ICB area but will also be dependent on the totality and type of palliative and end of life care provision from both NHS and non-NHS services, including charitable hospices, within each ICB area.

We, alongside key partners NHS England, will continue to proactively engage with our stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and independent hospices, on an ongoing basis, in order to understand the issues they face, and we will consider next steps on palliative and end of life care, including funding, in the coming months.

## ■ Hospices: Rural Areas

**Sir John Hayes:**

[\[15638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support hospices in (a) rural and (b) remote areas.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Most hospices are charitable, independent organisations which receive some statutory funding for providing National Health Services. The amount of funding each charitable hospice receives varies both within and between integrated care board (ICB) areas. This will vary depending on demand in that ICB area but will also be dependent on the totality and type of palliative and end of life care provision from both NHS and non-NHS services, including charitable hospices, within each ICB area.

Due to the way the hospice movement organically grew, hospice locations were largely not planned with a view to providing even access across the country, or to prioritise areas of greatest need based on demographics. Therefore, there are inequalities in access to hospice services, especially for those living in rural or socio-economically deprived areas. NHS England has developed a palliative and end of life

care dashboard, which brings together all relevant local data in one place. The dashboard helps commissioners understand the palliative and end of life care needs of those in their local population, thereby enabling ICBs to put plans in place to address and track the improvement of health inequalities.

I have met NHS England to discuss how to reduce inequalities and variation in access to, and the quality of, palliative and end of life care. We, alongside key partners NHS England, will continue to proactively engage with our stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and independent hospices, on an ongoing basis, in order to understand the issues they face.

## ■ Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency: Fees and Charges

**Jim Shannon:**

[\[15738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of proposed reforms to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's statutory fees structures on (a) the Agency, (b) industry, (c) the NHS and (d) patients.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) regulates medicines, medical devices, and blood components for transfusion in the United Kingdom.

Most of the MHRA's income comes from charging fees for its services. Its fees are set to recover the full cost of delivering the respective services. This is in compliance with the HM Treasury guidance, Managing Public Money.

The MHRA aims to update its fees every two years, so that it can continue to recover its costs. This ensures the agency's continued financial sustainability, and the ongoing delivery of its services.

The MHRA has recently consulted on its current fee uplift. The consultation has now closed, and they are analysing the responses. The Government response to the consultation should be published in the new year. With regards to the expected impacts:

- the fees uplift will ensure the MHRA's continued financial sustainability and the ongoing delivery of its services;
- the MHRA's fees will increase for industry, as by ensuring that the MHRA is fully recovering costs, it will be in a better position to deliver the level of service that the industry wants and expects;
- the MHRA's fees will increase for everyone, including the National Health Service, however, the impact on the NHS is expected to be small as it represents a small proportion of the MHRA's total income, and the increase in its costs is also expected to be small; and
- the fees uplift it will ensure the MHRA is sufficiently resourced to deliver its public health duties for patients, and additionally, the charging fees mean that the

regulated bear the cost of regulation, rather than the taxpayer and patients themselves.

#### ■ **Mental Health Services: Schools**

**Damian Hinds:**

[\[15640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the oral contribution of 20 November 2024 by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention, Official Report, columns 347 and 348, what his timetable is for having a mental health professional in every school.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

As part of our mission to build a National Health Service that is fit for the future and that is there when people need it, we will introduce access to a specialist mental health professional in every school, so that mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, can be identified early on and prevented from developing into more serious conditions in later life.

The timescale is not yet agreed. We are currently working with colleagues at NHS England and the Department for Education to consider options to deliver this commitment.

#### ■ **Mental Health Services: Software**

**Rebecca Long Bailey:**

[\[13789\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which mental health apps are (a) recommended and (b) linked to by the NHS on its website; and if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of the promotion of these apps by the NHS.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

The National Health Service website does not currently display or recommend any mental health apps, as the commissioning of these digital tools is done locally. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's Early Value Assessment conditionally recommends products for use in the NHS. So far five mental health topics have been assessed. These assessments have conditionally recommended a wide range of products to be used, while further evidence is generated.

The products that have been conditionally recommended within the five mental health topics can be found on the NICE website.

#### ■ **Methylphenidate: Shortages**

**Steff Aquarone:**

[\[16285\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 24 October 2024 to Question 9576 on Methylphenidate: Shortages, what recent progress her Department has made on improving the supply of methylphenidate in (a) Norfolk and (b) the UK.

**Karin Smyth:**

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

The Department has also worked with specialists to develop advice for National Health Service clinicians on prescribing available alternative brands of methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets, whilst supplies are limited. If this is not possible, advice has also been provided for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) specialists to offer other clinically appropriate and available options, both pharmacological and non-pharmacological, in line with the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence guidance, in order to avoid potentially disruptive breaks in treatment. To improve supply chain resiliency, we are also working with prospective new suppliers of methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets to expand the UK supplier base.

We are supporting an ADHD taskforce that NHS England is establishing to examine ADHD service provision. The taskforce will bring together expertise from across a broad range of sectors, including the NHS, education, and justice, to help provide a joined-up approach in response to concerns around rising demand. In collaboration with NHS England's national ADHD data improvement plan, we plan to combine modelling for future growth forecasts, which will be shared with industry to improve demand forecasting for ADHD medicines. The Department continually updates a list of currently available and unavailable ADHD products on the Specialist Pharmacy Service website. This helps ensure those involved in the prescribing and dispensing of ADHD medications can make informed decisions with patients. This list is available at the following link:

[www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/prescribing-available-medicines-to-treat-adhd](http://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/prescribing-available-medicines-to-treat-adhd)

**■ NHS: Managers****Dr Caroline Johnson:****[15219]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his planned timetable is to bring forward legislation to regulate NHS managers.

**Karin Smyth:**

This Government recognises the importance of ensuring that the NHS has strong and effective leadership in place, and we are committed to introducing professional standards for, and regulation of NHS managers. On 26 November 2024 we published a consultation seeking views from stakeholders on options for regulating NHS

managers. The consultation will close on 18 February 2025. We will carefully consider responses to the consultation and set out next steps in due course.

### ■ **NHS: Telephone Services**

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[15705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many calls within the NHS were translated by each language code in each of the last ten years; and what the cost was to the public purse in each of those years.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Department does not hold this information centrally.

### ■ **NHS: Termination of Employment**

**Mr Peter Bedford:**

[\[15696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many NHS employees' contracts of employment were terminated for underperformance in each year since 2020.

**Karin Smyth:**

NHS England publish monthly statistics detailing information on National Health Service staff recorded within the Electronic Staff Record, the human resource system for the NHS. Each quarter, these statistics include data on 'reasons for leaving', where these have been recorded upon a member of staff leaving or moving employment. The published data is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics>

The attached table summarises the published information, providing details for 2011/12 to 2023/24 of the total number of assignments of NHS staff where a reason for leaving is recorded. Within the total number, the number recorded against the four categories available to define dismissals are also presented. We believe the category 'dismissal – capability' is the best proxy for the data requested.

Data is presented from 2011/12 as we know the pattern of staff leaving or moving roles in the NHS was impacted in 2020/21 and 2021/22 by the pandemic and so comparison with pre-pandemic levels is appropriate.

Any interpretation of data should be made with the understanding that not all assignments that finish in the NHS result in a 'reason for leaving' being recorded. Therefore, the data presented can be viewed as a minimum number of leavers in any giving category. From analysis of the records of staff who leave NHS employment entirely it is estimated around one third of leavers do not have a reason recorded. There is no data available to confirm the completeness of recording of reasons around dismissals.

#### **Attachments:**

1. [PQ15696 - Supplementary table](#) [PQ15696 - Excel Table.xlsx]

## ■ NHS: Translation Services

**Richard Tice:**

[\[15072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much (a) United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust and (b) Lincolnshire Community Health Services spent on (i) translation and (ii) interpretation services in each of the last five years.

**Karin Smyth:**

The following table shows the amount of money United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust spent on translation and interpretation services each of the last five financial years:

| YEAR    | TOTAL SPEND |
|---------|-------------|
| 2019/20 | £158,395.00 |
| 2020/21 | £127,235.96 |
| 2021/22 | £162,501.32 |
| 2022/23 | £204,008.60 |
| 2023/24 | £248,547.00 |

In addition, the following table shows the amount of money Lincolnshire Community Health Services NHS Trust spent on translation and interpretation services in each of the last five financial years:

| YEAR    | TOTAL SPEND |
|---------|-------------|
| 2019/20 | £34,638     |
| 2020/21 | £43,790     |
| 2021/22 | £56,512     |
| 2022/23 | £71,885     |
| 2023/24 | £42,692     |

During the COVID-19 pandemic, spend on translation and interpretation services reduced due to the reduction in planned activity across the providers' sites. Since then, providers have significantly increased the number of patients they see and treat, which has resulted in increased interpretation and translation costs.

## ■ Nurses: Training

**Sir Julian Lewis:**

[\[16122\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to ensure the availability of learning disability nursing studies programmes in the South East.

**Karin Smyth:**

Individual universities are responsible for the courses that they offer. We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the National Health Service. A central and core part of this plan will be our workforce, and how we ensure we train and provide the staff the NHS needs, including doctors and nurses, to care for patients across our communities.

## ■ Pharmacy: Employers' Contributions

**Dr Danny Chambers:**

[\[16102\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October, whether he has made an estimate of the (a) overall cost to pharmacies and (b) the estimated average cost per business in the pharmacy sector of the proposed increase to employer National Insurance contributions.

**Dr Danny Chambers:**

[\[16103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October, if he will make an estimate of the number of pharmacies that will pay increased National Insurance contributions (a) nationally and (b) by constituency.

**Dr Danny Chambers:**

[\[16105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October, whether he has made an estimate of the total cost to pharmacy businesses of the proposed increase in employer National Insurance contributions (a) nationally and (b) by constituency.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 28 November 2024]:* We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, which enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department, from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The employer National Insurance rise will be implemented April 2025, and the Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year at the earliest opportunity.

**■ Pharmacy: Finance****Adam Dance:**[\[13333\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of increasing (a) funding and (b) support for community pharmacies.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

Pharmacies play a vital role in our healthcare system. We are committed to expanding the role of pharmacies and better utilising the skills of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. That includes making prescribing part of the services delivered by community pharmacists, as we shift care from the hospital to the community.

Now that the Budget for Government has been set, we will shortly be resuming our consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding the funding arrangements.

**■ Post-mortems****Mrs Sharon Hodgson:**[\[15419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that parents do not have to wait six months or more for post-mortem results following the death of a baby.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Government recognises the significant impact of delays in post-mortems on bereaved families. Specialised perinatal pathology services provide medical investigations, including post-mortem examinations following the death of a foetus or baby. These services are delivered by 18 National Health Service hospital trusts in England.

Perinatal pathology services are currently experiencing significant staff shortages. There are 26.15 whole time equivalent consultant vacancies, which is a 46% vacancy rate across the service. The lack of consultant staff is impacting the service's ability to produce post-mortem reports in line with national standards, as set out in NHS England's service specification B, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/e12-perinatal-path.pdf>

In response to the impact that the staffing challenges are having have on the service, NHS England has established a Perinatal Pathology Transformation Programme which is implementing interventions to increase perinatal pathology service capacity over time and improve the post-mortem reporting time. The programme reports to a national Steering Group which has clinical, commissioning, and key stakeholder representation, including service users and patient and public voice representation, through the baby loss charity Sands. The Royal College of Pathologists is also included in the membership of the Steering Group.



Additionally, we welcome and are carefully considering the findings of the Justice Committee's recent follow-up Inquiry into the Coroner Service, including on coronial pathology provision.

## ■ Prescriptions: ICT

**Sarah Champion:**

[\[15775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support the implementation of electronic prescribing across all NHS settings.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Frontline Digitisation programme in NHS England is supporting National Health Service trusts to reach a core level of digitisation, as set out in our minimum digital foundations.

83% of all NHS trusts have stated that they have electronic prescribing capabilities in place, largely as part of their core Electronic Patient Record. NHS England's Transformation Directorate is supporting the remaining NHS trusts to achieve this as part of their core level of digitisation over the next financial year.

In primary care, 95% of all prescriptions are produced electronically via the national Electronic Prescription Service (EPS). The EPS is not strictly mandated, but it is strongly recommended for use by prescribing and dispensing services in NHS settings.

## ■ Primodos: Research

**Laurence Turner:**

[\[15986\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 12696 on Primodos: Research, whether the meeting of the Commission on Human Medicines has taken place.

**Karin Smyth:**

*[Holding answer 28 November 2024]:* The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), together with wider Government, have committed to reviewing any new scientific evidence which comes to light.

The new publication by Danielsson et al has been reviewed by the MHRA and advice has been sought from the Government's independent advisory body, the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM), who have provided their independent expert advice on our assessment of whether the findings of the latest publication justify a further review. The MHRA will consider the recommendations given by the CHM before deciding whether any further action is warranted.

The minutes of the November CHM meeting will be made publicly available through the GOV.UK website at the earliest opportunity.

## ■ Psilocybin

**Neil Duncan-Jordan:**

[\[16066\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to (a) reschedule Psilocybin to allow it to be prescribed and (b) retain its status as a class A substance for other purposes.

**Karin Smyth:**

There are no current plans to reschedule psilocybin under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, also known as the Act.

There is an established process for the development of medicines, overseen by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). This enables medicines, including those containing Schedule 1 controlled drugs under the Act, such as psilocybin, to be developed, evaluated in clinical trials, and licensed, based on an assessment of their safety, quality, and efficacy, before being made available to patients in the United Kingdom. Should an application be submitted for a marketing authorisation, for a product licence, it will ultimately be a decision for the MHRA whether to license psilocybin as a therapy. There are no psilocybin-based medicines with a marketing authorisation in the UK.

If a manufacturer is successful in being granted a marketing authorisation by the MHRA for a medicine containing psilocybin, the Home Office is committed to reviewing its scheduling under the Act, subject to advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on the appropriate scheduling and safeguards for the medicine.

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is supporting psilocybin research via the NIHR King's Clinical Research Facility, the NIHR Oxford Health Clinical Research Facility, and the NIHR Maudsley Biomedical Research Centre, where researchers are developing and evaluating the efficacy and safety of psilocybin therapies.

## ■ Social Services

**Helen Morgan:**

[\[10183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the number of patients that are fit to be discharged but have remained in hospital due to the unavailability of social care since January 2022.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

*[Holding answer 24 October 2024]:* Since April 2022, there have been, by monthly average, 12,828 people in hospital daily with no criteria to reside; however, we do not hold data on which or how many of these people have been in hospital for the entirety of this time.

In October 2024, 33% of patients who have a length of stay of 14 or more days were delayed due to capacity reasons, however these delays include both National Health Service-commissioned and adult social care capacity.

**Laurence Turner:**

[R] [\[15612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent progress he has made on establishing the Adult Social Care Negotiating Body.

**Stephen Kinnock:**

On 10 October 2024, the Government introduced the Employment Rights Bill in Parliament. Among other powers, and as currently drafted, the bill confers powers on my Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to establish a body to negotiate for Fair Pay Agreements in the adult social care sector. This bill is currently at the committee stage in the House of Commons.

The Department is currently engaging national stakeholders, as it works towards implementing Fair Pay Agreements in the care sector, and will fully consult, including on the establishment of a negotiating body, following Royal Assent of the Employment Rights Bill.

#### ■ **Torbay Hospital: Finance**

**Steve Darling:**

[\[15875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make a decision on the funding of Torbay Hospital under the New Hospital Programme before 31 December 2024.

**Karin Smyth:**

The Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust is currently developing their Strategic Outline Case for the new Torbay Hospital scheme. Following review and agreement of the Strategic Outline Case, the next step would be the development, review, and agreement of the Outline and Full Business Cases. Through this process, the final funding amount is determined, as is usual for large infrastructure projects.

Torbay Hospital is in scope of the review into the New Hospital Programme. My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, will set out further details of the outcome of the review at the earliest opportunity, alongside a new delivery schedule for the programme.

## HOME OFFICE

#### ■ **Agricultural Machinery and Livestock: Theft**

**Ben Maguire:**

[\[15548\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals on penalties for theft of (a) livestock and (b) GPS farming equipment.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

This Government is committed to reducing crime in rural areas, with tougher measures to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, strengthened neighbourhood policing and stronger measures to prevent farm theft and fly-tipping.

The government recognises the distress livestock worrying can cause animals and their keepers. We are considering the most effective ways to deliver our commitments in this area and will be setting out next steps in due course.

We are also committed to implementing the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 and support its intentions to fend off the theft and re-sale of high-value equipment, particularly equipment used in an agricultural setting. I met with Ruth Bailey, CEO of Agriculture Association on the 5th November 2024 .

The Act requires secondary legislation before it can come into effect. We are currently considering the views of those who may be affected by the legislation and its regulations, including manufacturers, to understand the potential implications and determine the scope of the legislation, including what equipment it will include.

### ■ Asylum: Detainees

**Dr Simon Opher:**

[15903]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to publish the criteria for determining which individuals seeking asylum will be subject to detention.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

The Home Office has published guidance for determining who can be detained under immigration powers including those who are seeking asylum.

'Detained Asylum Casework' sets out for the criteria for our caseworkers to determine under which circumstances asylum claimants may be detained, and their claims routed for consideration and decision under the process. This is available at the link below:

[detained-asylum-process-v5.0.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).

'Detention: general instructions' sets out the criteria for making detention decisions and deciding whether to maintain detention. This is available at the link below:

[Detention: general instructions \(accessible\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

### ■ Buildings: Insulation

**Dan Carden:**

[15511]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has had discussions with the Fire Brigades Union, in the context of the report entitled Dangerous cladding: the government's remediation portfolio, published by the National Audit Office on 4 November 2024.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government is the lead on building remediation and is due to meet the Fire Brigades Union in the new year.

## ■ Firearms: Licensing

**Matt Bishop:**

[\[15362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the suspension of firearm certificate grants by Gloucestershire Constabulary.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Chief Constables have operational responsibility for consideration of firearms licensing applications and the allocation of resources to firearms licensing units.

However, we expect police forces to ensure that all applications for firearm certificates, whether new applications or those for renewal, are dealt with as efficiently as possible subject to addressing public safety risks.

## ■ Home Office: Consultants

**Dan Carden:**

[\[15513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much her Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Home Office holds information on consultancy fees and reports this in its Annual Report and Accounts.

Refer to the links and pages below for the available published information that relates to consultancy spending.

Pages 155-157 (Pages 159-161 on the pdf reader) of the 2023-24 Home Office Annual Report and Accounts

[Home Office Annual Report and Accounts 2023 to 2024 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Pages 173-175 of the 2022-23 Home Office Annual Report and Accounts

[Home Office Annual Report and Accounts 2022-2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Pages 107-108 of the the 2022-23 Home Office Annual Report and Accounts

[Home Office ARA 21-22 Final - Gov.uk.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Pages 99-101 of the 2020-21 Home Office Annual Report and Accounts

[HO annual report and accounts 2020-21 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Information relating to financial year 2024-25 will be available following the end of the financial year and once the Home Office Annual Report and Accounts have been laid before Parliament.

Note that the Home Office reports by its financial year (April-March), rather than on a calendar year basis.

**■ Illegal Migration Act 2023****Dr Simon Opher:** [\[15902\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has plans to repeal the Illegal Migration Act 2023.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

The Government has made clear that the migration partnership with Rwanda will end. Consequently, the Government is considering all options connected with ending that partnership, including for the entirety of the Illegal Migration Act 2023. Legislative plans will be published in due course.

I refer the Honourable Member to PQ 4812.

**■ Licensing Act 2003****Alex Sobel:** [\[15654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the Licensing Act 2003 to include a legal definition of the term drunk.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The High Court has set out in case law (*Neale v E* 1984) that the word 'drunk' should be given its 'ordinary and natural meaning'.

It is an offence under S.141 of the Licensing Act 2003 knowingly to serve alcohol to someone who is drunk. It is also an offence under S.142 of the Licensing Act 2002 to obtain alcohol for someone who is drunk. Those who commit either offence could be fined up to £1000.

Ultimately the decision to serve alcohol to a person is taken by an appropriate person within a licensed premises – for example a designated premises supervisor.

**■ Licensing Laws****Alex Sobel:** [\[15651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to extend the temporary off-sales regulatory easement in the Business and Planning Act 2020 beyond 31 March 2025.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Home Office conducted a consultation on the future of the temporary off-sales regulatory easement earlier this year. A response will be published in due course.

**■ Migrants: Detainees****Dr Simon Opher:** [\[15894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to introduce a statutory time limit on immigration detention.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

There are currently no plans to introduce a time limit on immigration detention. This would risk significantly weakening our ability to remove those who have breached our immigration laws or who refuse to leave the UK voluntarily.

**Dr Simon Opher:**[\[15896\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle abuse in immigration detention centres.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

We expect all suppliers operating on behalf of the Home Office to treat detained individuals with decency and respect, behaving in line with the high standards outlined in the Detention Centre Rules, published operating standards and service delivery contracts.

A range of safety and security safeguards operate in all IRCs to ensure the safety of all detained individuals, staff and visitors.

The Home Office is reviewing current processes in relation to violence prevention and use of force and have introduced a programme focused on improving the overall culture in IRCs. A new staffing model delivers a considerably improved ratio of custodial staff per detained individual. This is tailored to each centre's requirements and layout, deploying staff where they are most needed as they support detained individuals in their journey through detention.

**■ Non-crime Hate Incidents****Neil O'Brien:**[\[15256\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many non-crime hate incidents were recorded by each police force in each year since 2014.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

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

**Rupert Lowe:**[\[15615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 14367 on Non-Crime Hate Incidents, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of collecting data on non-crime hate incidents.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Government is carefully considering next steps relating to the recording of non-crime hate incidents.

**■ Police Community Support Officers: Greater Manchester****Tom Morrison:** [\[16257\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an impact assessment of changes in the numbers of Police Community Support Officers in Greater Manchester.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

This Government wants to ensure that policing has the support that they need so that they can get back to tackling the issues that that matter to the public. That is why we are delivering an additional 13,000 police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles and ensuring every community has a named officer to turn to.

We are considering the implementation of our plans around neighbourhood policing and the growth in neighbourhood officers as a key priority. We are doing this alongside key partners across policing to ensure that we deliver an effective plan that delivers the best service for the public.

**■ Police: Bureaucracy****Ruth Cadbury:** [\[15438\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of trends in the level of time spent by police officers completing paperwork as part of the requirements set out in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

It is important for the investigation of offences, as well as for ensuring transparency and accountability in policing, that effective records are kept, and data is recorded. But it is vital that these processes are proportionate and do not get in the way of everyday police work.

This Government is committed to tackling unnecessary bureaucracy and will work with police forces to build on the foundation of the Policing Productivity Review, working with the College of Policing to support forces to ensure officers are able to use their time more productively.

The Home Office's Annual Data Requirement (ADR) is a list of all requests for data made to chief officers of police forces in England and Wales under the Home Secretary's statutory powers. There is a robust and stringent process underpinning the ADR to review existing requests and consider new or amended requests.

**■ Police: Employers' Contributions****Mr Richard Holden:** [\[15908\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will reimburse police forces with the cost of proposed increases to employer national insurance contributions.



**Dame Diana Johnson:**

The Government will fully compensate police forces for the impact of the changes to National Insurance Employer contributions.

Details on the allocation of this funding will be confirmed at the provisional police settlement in mid-December.

**Police: Recruitment****Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[16281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) police officers, (b) Police Community Support Officers and (c) special constables are planned to be recruited between 1 December 2024 and 31 March 2025.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

As part of the Government's Safer Streets mission, the Home Secretary has made a clear commitment to strengthen neighbourhood policing through the introduction of a Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. This will include delivering an additional 13,000 police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles and ensuring every community has a named officer to turn to.

We are working closely with policing to implement this commitment and will announce our plans for the delivery of neighbourhood officers shortly.

**Pregabalin: Misuse****Colum Eastwood:**[\[15532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to (a) review and (b) raise the classification of pregabalin under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

**Dame Diana Johnson:**

Pregabalin is currently controlled under Class C of the Misuse of Dugs Act 1971. The Government takes expert advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), which is the independent advisory body on drugs, on the classification of substances under the 1971 Act and scheduling under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001.

Controlled drugs are placed in the appropriate class and schedule following consideration of advice from the ACMD on the potential harms of misuse, and an assessment of their medicinal or therapeutic usefulness and the need for legitimate access. The ACMD announced in February this year that they are looking to launch an updated harms assessment for gabapentinoids, which includes pregabalin, to review the position of these drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The Government will consider the findings of the ACMD's review once published.

The ACMD's work programme is available on the Gov.UK website: [ACMD work programme 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

## ■ Undocumented Migrants: Crime

**Rupert Lowe:**

[16107]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister for Border Security and Asylum in response to the question from the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth during Oral Questions to the Home Office on 25 November 2024, what data will be published; when that data will be published; and whether that data will include crimes committed by irregular migrants.

**Dame Angela Eagle:**

I refer the Honourable Member to the statistics published on Thursday 28 November by the Home Office which can be found on the [Migration statistics](#) gov.uk page.

Data on [Foreign national offenders in UK prisons](#) is available in the House of Lords Library and comes from the Ministry of Justice's [Offender management statistics quarterly](#) release.

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### ■ Agriculture: Compulsory Purchase

**Gareth Davies:**

[8489]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department is taking steps to support farmers affected by compulsory purchase orders for nationally significant infrastructure projects to find alternative land nearby.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Development Consent Orders can include provisions which allow the applicant to compulsorily acquire land, with applicants required to follow the process and procedures set out in the Planning Act 2008 and associated regulations.

Government guidance for applicants seeking authorisation for the compulsory acquisition of land reinforces that applicants should demonstrate that all reasonable alternatives have been explored. Applicants need to demonstrate that proposed interference with the rights of those with an interest in the land is for a legitimate purpose, and that it is necessary and proportionate.

The Secretary of State must be persuaded that the purposes for which an order authorises the compulsory acquisition of land are legitimate and are sufficient to justify interfering with the human rights of those with an interest in the land affected. These matters are considered by the Examining Authority during its examination and inform its recommendation to the Secretary of State.

## ■ Bellwin Scheme

**Dr Neil Hudson:**

[16267]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on activating the Bellwin Scheme in response to (a) Storm Bert and (b) other storms.

**Alex Norris:**

The impact of flooding, wherever it occurs, is traumatic for the communities impacted and I have great sympathy for all those affected. The government is ready to consider local authority requests for Bellwin Scheme support which can help with the reimbursement of immediate eligible costs for the local authorities affected by the recent storms, including Storm Bert.

## ■ Buildings: Co-ownership

**Mohammad Yasin:**

[15509]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to respond to the call for evidence entitled Jointly owned properties which closed on 7 April 2024.

**Alex Norris:**

The Government has no immediate plans to respond to the call for evidence launched by the previous administration entitled Jointly owned properties, and which closed on 7 April 2024. The Government is however reviewing how to better protect leaseholders from costs relating to building safety.

## ■ Business Rates: Tax Allowances

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[15205]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the number of hereditaments that will qualify for retail, hospitality and leisure business rates relief in financial year 2024-25.

**Jim McMahon:**

The latest local authority data on the number of hereditaments in receipt of reliefs is published here: [National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#). The supplementary data tables provide the relevant breakdown and show the number of hereditaments in receipt of reliefs as of 31 December 2023.

## ■ Cladding Safety Scheme: Slough

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese:**

[15235]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many and what proportion of buildings have registered for the Cladding Safety Scheme in Slough constituency.

**Alex Norris:**

The Cladding Safety Scheme is able to confirm how many buildings based in the Slough constituency have registered with the scheme. To date, there have been six applications to the Cladding Safety Scheme in the Slough constituency. Two buildings were confirmed as not requiring remedial works in their Fire Risk Appraisal External Wall PAS 9980 reports, which are required to confirm eligibility to the scheme. These applications are now closed. Four are confirmed as in programme and have received pre-tender financial support. They are now compiling their works packages. This includes appointing a professional team, scoping the project and developing a works specification.

**■ Community Ownership Fund****Jess Brown-Fuller:**[\[15628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of cancellation of the Community Ownership Fund on the projects of applicants.

**Alex Norris:**

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [11941](#) on 8 November 2024.

**■ Council Tax: Probate****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[15203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the report entitled Summary of responses and government's response to the consultation on proposals to exempt categories of dwellings from the council tax premiums in England, published on 11 March 2024, whether the exclusions for properties that are actively marketed for sale and let, apply for up to (a) 12 and (b) 24 months after the property first became unoccupied; and whether the sale and let exclusion can be applied and stack after the probate exemption expires if a home that has exited probate is then marketed for sale or rent.

**Jim McMahon:**

This Government has published guidance for councils and taxpayers on the application of council tax premiums and exceptions. This guidance is available [here](#). The exception for properties actively marketed for sale or let will apply for up to 12 months from which the dwelling has first been marketed for sale or let. Exceptions can be applied in succession.

**■ Councillors' Interests****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[15454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance her Department issues to local authorities on whether councillors should declare ownership of property which is (a) rented out to their local authority at a

commercial rate and (b) used by their local authority at a commercial rate via a third party.

**Jim McMahon:**

Local authority members must register and disclose pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests with their authority.

This includes contracts where a member is providing a service to their local authority, as well as any land interests they may have in the local authority area.

The government guidance ‘ [Openness and transparency on personal interests: guidance for councillors](#) ’ provides practical information to councillors about how to be open and transparent about their personal interests.

■ **Devolution: Hertfordshire**

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[15462]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department’s planned timetable is for publication of the English Devolution Bill; and how that Bill will impact Hertfordshire.

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[15463]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what powers she plans to devolve to Hertfordshire.

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[15465]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an estimate of the cost of further devolution in Hertfordshire.

**Jim McMahon:**

The English Devolution White Paper, due to be published shortly, will set an ambitious new framework for English devolution, moving power out of Westminster and back to those who know their areas best. In July, the Deputy Prime Minister invited places without devolution agreements, including Hertfordshire, to come forward with proposals for their areas. This process closed in September and the government will engage closely with local leaders and stakeholders to review proposals.

This government believes that the benefits of devolution are best achieved through the establishment of combined authorities or combined county authorities over sensible economic geographies and supported by a mayor. We want every part of England to take its place on the Council of Nations and Regions, with strong and effective partnerships in place with councils and other partners to deliver the missions we have set out to transform the country.

## ■ Economic Growth: South West

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[15587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to support economic growth in (a) Gloucester and (b) the South West.

**Alex Norris:**

This Government recognises the importance that Gloucester plays as part of the UK's economy, alongside the significant contribution that the South West makes on the national and international stage. HMT is committed to supporting the national agenda for growth, working with regional stakeholders to deliver investment and programmes which will drive forwards solutions that positively impact businesses and residents across the South West.

Through the recent Budget announcement, HMT reaffirmed its commitment to Levelling Up Round 3, with £11,000,000 dedicated to the Greyfriars regeneration project in the City Centre. In addition to this, in October 2024 Gloucester City Council was awarded £688,484 under the Brownfield Land Release Fund 2 (BLRF2) to use the money to turn surplus land into new homes. Gloucester City Council has also benefited from £1,486,352 Shared Prosperity Fund, with local autonomy to direct funding to projects which best support economic growth in the area. Allocations to areas for the period 25/26 are expected to be released in December 2024.

The Government is currently undertaking a consultation with stakeholders to help shape the national Industrial Strategy and in parallel with this, officers from Cities and Local Growth Unit will be engaging with partners and businesses across the South West to understand how HMG investment can be best shaped to support economic growth in the region. The upcoming Spending Review in 2025 will further develop potential future funding streams for Gloucester and the wider South West.

## ■ Electric Vehicles and Heat Pumps

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the press release entitled CCC advises 81% reduction in emissions by 2035, published by the Climate Change Committee on 26 October 2024 and the letter from the Committee of that date to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on the National Determined Contribution, what steps she is taking to remove planning barriers for (a) heat pumps and (b) electric vehicle chargers.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Nationally set permitted development rights enable the installation of air and ground source heat pumps and electric vehicle charge points without the need to submit a planning application. The rights are subject to certain conditions and limitations to protect local amenity.

The previous government consulted on proposed changes to these rights, and on 21 November we announced our intention to amend the existing permitted development

right for air source heat pumps to allow more flexibility in installation and size of heat pumps. Further information is available at: [Warm Homes Plan and heat pumps – MHCLG in the Media](#).

Further announcements on electric vehicle charge points will be made in due course.

## ■ Empty Property and Second Homes: Council Tax

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to footnote 2 of her Department's Guidance on the implementation of the council tax premiums on long-term empty homes and second homes, published on 1 November 2024, what steps she plans to take to prevent local authorities from disregarding the requirement to advertise in at least one newspaper circulating in its area.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15448\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's Guidance on the implementation of the council tax premiums on long-term empty homes and second homes, published on 1 November 2024, which of the exclusions across Classes F to M can be applied cumulatively to other exclusions at the end of initial exclusion.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government's published guidance clearly set out the responsibilities of councils when making a determination to charge a council tax premium. The time limited exceptions to council tax premiums can be applied in succession where the dwelling is eligible.

## ■ Floods: Cambridgeshire

**Ben Obese-Jecty:**

[\[16253\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which agency leads the multi-agency response to flooding in Cambridgeshire.

**Alex Norris:**

Cambridgeshire constabulary will usually chair local strategic and tactical response coordination meetings attended by a range of relevant partners including the emergency services, local authorities, and the Environment Agency.

Multi-agency flood response in Cambridgeshire is coordinated through Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum (CPLRF) who will stand up response structures to help respond to and recover from major emergencies or incidents that may occur. Any agency within the LRF can declare a major incident.

## ■ Green Belt

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[\[15469\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Proposed reforms to the National

Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, updated 24 September 2024, what steps her Department is taking to protect the Green Belt in (a) England and (b) Hertsmere constituency.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government is committed to preserving the greenbelt which has served England's towns and cities well over many decades. Without changing its purposes or general extent, we intend to take a more strategic approach to Green Belt land designation and release, so that we can build more homes in the right places.

Our proposed approach to the Green Belt, including prioritising the release of lower quality grey belt land and introducing 'golden rules' to ensure development benefits communities and nature, was set out in our recent consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework. The consultation closed on the 24 September and officials in my department are currently analysing responses with a view to publishing a government response before the end of the year.

■ **High Rise Flats: Fire Extinguishers**

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[15486\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many and what proportion of high rise buildings have sprinklers installed.

**Alex Norris:**

The department does not hold information on how many nor what proportion of high-rise buildings have sprinklers installed.

The Building Regulations set out the required performance of new building work. The Regulations are supported by statutory guidance in Approved Documents; Approved Document B 'Fire Safety' was updated in May 2020 so that blocks of flats with a top storey more than 11 metres above ground level should be fitted with a sprinkler system. Under Part 4 of the Building Safety Act 2022, accountable persons for higher-risk buildings are required to register the building with the Building Safety Regulator and provide Key Building Information covering all fire and smoke control equipment, including sprinklers. A designated Responsible Person is obliged, under The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, to ensure that existing residential buildings have appropriate fire safety measures.

■ **High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention**

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[15484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions her Department has had with (a) cladding and (b) insulation manufacturers on financial contributions to building safety remediation works.

**Alex Norris:**

The department is clear that all those responsible for unsafe cladding being used on buildings should take responsibility for paying to remove it.



The Cabinet Office has written to organisations named in the Inquiry, who bear different levels of responsibility for the failings. For those found by the Inquiry to have been part of these horrific failings, this is the first step to stopping them being awarded government contracts.

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[15485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she expects building remediation works carried out through the Building Safety Fund to be completed.

**Mike Amesbury:**

[\[15487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much (a) has been spent from and (b) remains in the Building Safety Fund as of 21 November 2024.

**Alex Norris:**

As of 31 October 2024 (note this is the department's last published data release) a total of £1.742 billion expenditure has been paid from the Building Safety Fund. The Government has committed £5.1 billion to fund the removal of unsafe cladding.

As of the 31 October 2024, out of a total of 810 eligible Building Safety Fund buildings, 352 (44%) have completed remediation, 166 buildings are on site (20%) are on site and 292 (36%) are yet to commence works.

The Government remains committed to increasing the overall pace of addressing life-safety fire risk defects to ensure that remediation works carried out through the BSF are completed as quickly as possible, whilst minimising the disruption and inconvenience caused by works for those living in affected high-rise buildings.

People's safety will remain paramount.

## ■ **Holiday Accommodation: Taxation**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to allow local authorities to impose local taxes on (a) hotel and (b) short-term let stays.

**Jim McMahon:**

For the purposes of local taxation, all property is either domestic or non-domestic and is generally subject to either council tax or business rates. Whether any discounts or exemptions may apply will depend on the specific circumstances of each property.

## ■ **Housing: Hertsmere**

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[\[15468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, updated 24

September 2024, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the proposed reforms on housing targets in Hertsmere constituency.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The proposed standard methodology to calculate local housing need figures for each local authority, including for Hertsmere, is set out in the 'Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system' consultation documents. These can be found at gov.uk.

■ **Leasehold: Forfeiture**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[15206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to reform the leasehold law on forfeiture.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Yes, the government is committed to removing the disproportionate and draconian threat of forfeiture as a means of ensuring compliance with a lease agreement.

■ **Leasehold: Ground Rent**

**Gregory Stafford:** [\[15399\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of ground rent costs on the ability of long-term leaseholders to sell their leased properties.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer the Hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)).

■ **Leasehold: Reform**

**Rachel Blake:** [\[15320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to consult on the draft of the Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

I refer my hon Friend to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)).

■ **Local Government**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[15442\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her speech at the Local Government Association Conference of 24 October 2024, what deliverable plans councils will need to put in place.

**Jim McMahon:**

Councils under statutory intervention are directed to develop and implement clear, deliverable plans for reform and recovery that address their specific governance and

financial challenges and protect local taxpayers. The six councils under statutory intervention are supported in driving progress by Commissioners or Panels appointed by the Secretary of State, who provide written updates on the latest position of each council. I refer the Hon Member to Written Ministerial Statements made on 20 November 2024 ([HCWS235](#)) and 22 October 2024 ([HCWS155](#)). Through this approach, we are committed to resetting the relationship between local and regional government to establish partnerships built on mutual respect, genuine collaboration and meaningful engagement.

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[\[15464\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what criteria she uses to create regional authorities.

**Jim McMahon:**

This government believes that the benefits of devolution are best achieved through the establishment of combined authorities or combined county authorities over sensible economic geographies and supported by a mayor. We want every part of England to take its place on the Council of Nations and Regions, with strong and effective partnerships in place with councils and other partners to deliver the missions we have set out to transform the country.

#### ■ **Local Government Finance**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her speech at the Local Government Association Conference of 24 October 2024, whether she plans to end the allocation of funding to local government by bidding.

**Jim McMahon:**

The government is committed to pursuing a comprehensive set of reforms for public services to return the local government sector to a sustainable position. This will be done in partnership with local government and on the principle of giving forward notice and certainty to allow time for councils to plan.

To further support the sector, we will end time-consuming competitive bidding processes and cut burdensome reporting requirements around government grants - allowing local authorities to focus on delivering services for their residents. We will also reduce the number of restrictive grants, and consolidate them into the Local Government Finance Settlement wherever possible.

#### ■ **Local Government: Accountability**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the extent to which local authorities are meeting their obligations under the Local Government Transparency Code to publish up to date information.

**Jim McMahon:**

The purpose of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 (the Code) is to make it easier for the public to directly hold their councils to account, not as a means for central government to check up on local authorities. Therefore, the government does not monitor compliance with the Code.

If there were concerns about a local authorities' compliance with the Code, a complaint could be made to the local authority's Monitoring Officer, or via their complaints procedure. It is possible to make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman where the usual complaints procedures have been exhausted, or to make a Freedom of Information request if local authorities continue to fail in fulfilling their duties under the Code.

**Local Government: Elections****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[15210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in which local authority areas combined authority mayoral elections will take place in 2025.

**Jim McMahon:**

There are two scheduled combined authority mayoral elections in 2025; the Mayor for West of England Combined Authority which includes the local authority areas of Bristol City, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire, and the Mayor for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority which includes the local authority area of Peterborough City Council and the local authorities in Cambridgeshire. Subject to parliamentary approval to the legislation establishing a new Mayoral Combined Authority for Hull and East Yorkshire, their first mayoral election will also take place in 2025 including the local authority areas of Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[15212\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what plans she has to postpone local government elections due to be held in 2025.

**Jim McMahon:**

We have no plans to postpone local government elections due to be held in 2025.

**Local Government: Equality****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[15207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11179 on Local Government: Equality, whether her Department holds copies of the Local Government Association's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion learning resources and tools.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Local Government Association's (LGAs) Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion learning resources and tools are available on the LGA website:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equalities-hub>, which could have been easily found online without the need for a parliamentary question.

## ■ Local Government: Staff

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[15441]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her speech at the Local Government Association Conference of 24 October 2024, what the terms of reference of the Workforce Development Group are.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Local Government Workforce Development Group will provide a central-local partnership on local government capacity and capability challenges. It will try to identify the priority cross-cutting issues impacting the local government workforce as a whole and seek creative solutions to address them.

## ■ Local Plans

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[15466]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, updated 24 September 2024, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the proposed reforms on Local Plans.

**Sir Oliver Dowden:**

[15467]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, updated 24 September 2024, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the proposed reforms on the timing of the (a) submission and (b) adoption of Local Plans.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

This government inherited a planning system in which only 31% of local planning authorities have adopted plans in the last five years.

We are determined to drive local plans to adoption as quickly as possible, to progress towards our ambition of achieving universal plan coverage and ensure plans contribute positively to our ambition of delivering 1.5 million homes.

In our recent consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), we set out changes to how we plan for the homes we need.

In drafting proposals for the consultation, we considered the impact upon plans at all stages of plan making. The proposed transitional arrangements aimed to strike a balance between maintaining the progress of plans at more advanced stages of preparation, while maximising proactive planning for the homes our communities need. They apply differently depending on what stage of preparation the plan has reached and the extent to which it is meeting the government's housing growth

aspirations. The transitional arrangements for plans will be confirmed when the revised NPPF is published.

As part of wider reforms, it is currently our intention to implement the new plan-making system as set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act from Summer or Autumn 2025. The new system will be simpler, faster, and shaped by the views of communities about how their area should evolve.

### ■ **Mayors: Cheshire**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[15211\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to create an elected mayor in Cheshire.

**Jim McMahon:**

The Minister for Local Government and English Devolution met with Leaders from Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, and Warrington Councils on 3 September to discuss next steps for devolution in the area.

The government will continue to work closely with the area to agree a way forward to deliver an ambitious devolution agreement for Cheshire and Warrington.

This government believes that the benefits of devolution are best achieved through the establishment of combined authorities supported by a mayor with a strategic role across a wider geography, working closely with council leaders.

The English Devolution White Paper will set an ambitious new framework for English devolution, moving power out of Westminster and back to those who know their areas best.

### ■ **Parking: Private Sector**

**Stuart Anderson:** [\[15481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to publish a private parking code of practice.

**Alex Norris:**

The Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019 places a duty on the Government to prepare a code of practice containing guidance about the operation and management of private parking facilities.

The Government is determined to drive up standards in the private parking sector and we will announce our plans for the new Code in due course.

### ■ **Planning Authorities: Staff**

**Andrew Cooper:** [\[15383\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of requiring students studying for a royal

town planning institute course to complete a 12-month placement within a local planning authority as part of their accreditation.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government recognise the importance of town planning students getting the broadest range of knowledge and experience as they study, including an understanding of the vital work undertaken by local planning authorities. That is why the department funds the Local Government Association's Pathways to Planning programme. This places non-planning graduates, from a variety of backgrounds and locations, into local planning authorities whilst also receiving a bursary for an RTPI fully accredited master's course. Many universities offer a year out in industry which benefits students and readies them for work.

More broadly, the government has announced a £46 million package of investment into the planning system to support capacity and capability in local planning authorities, including through the recruitment and training of 300 graduate and apprentice planners and the development of skills needed to implement reforms and unlock housing delivery.

■ **Private Rented Housing: Licensing**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on the level of selective licensing fees charged by each local authority with such a scheme; and what the average fee is in England.

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[R] [\[15449\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the new Property Portal requirements on the private rented sector will be in addition to selective licensing requirements, where such selective licensing requirement is in effect.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

Local authorities set fees for their selective licensing schemes based on a number of factors including the set-up costs of the scheme, the cost of assessing applications and issuing licences, and the cost of inspecting properties where necessary.

The government expects local authorities to make details of these fees, along with the rationale behind their determination to be transparent and readily accessible. Money raised through enforcement sanctions should be used to enforce high standards in private rented properties.

Selective licensing and the Private Rented Sector Database have different purposes. The database is not designed to replace selective licensing. Selective licensing schemes aim to target specific local issues by enabling more intensive proactive enforcement strategies. Selective licensing is a valuable tool enabling local authorities to drive better outcomes for local residents, tenants, and responsible landlords. We will continue to review the use of selective licensing as we develop the

Private Rented Sector Database and will look to refine the way the two systems work together including through sharing data.

## ■ Property: Registration

**Charlotte Nichols:** [15253]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make it her policy to make public a full register of beneficial ownership of land.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

On 27 December 2023, the previous government launched a consultation on how to make land ownership more transparent where trusts are involved. The consultation closed on 21 February 2024 and officials in my department are considering the responses received.

## ■ Renters' Rights Bill

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [R] [15451]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reason an impact assessment for the Renters' Rights Bill was not published at (a) First Reading and (b) Second Reading; and if she will make it her policy to ensure impact assessments for all future Bills are published at First Reading.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government published its Impact Assessment for the Renters' Rights Bill on 22 November 2024, following scrutiny from the Regulatory Policy Committee. The Impact Assessment received a 'green' rating, indicating it is 'fit for purpose'. The Impact Assessment can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

## ■ Social Rented Housing: Eligibility

**Danny Beales:** [15535]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will extend the exemption for the local connection test to survivors of modern slavery.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

The government is committed to ensuring that, where appropriate, barriers preventing vulnerable groups in need from accessing social housing are removed.

We are working with stakeholders to explore the detail of the proposed exemptions from local connection requirements further and consider what more needs to be done to support vulnerable cohorts, including victims of modern slavery.

There are alternative routes for vulnerable cohorts to access social housing.

Guidance asks local authorities to make exemptions for applications with special circumstances, such as those who need to move for medical reasons or who are at risk of harm and to escape violence.



## ■ Solar Power: Planning Permission

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[15440\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11493 on Buildings and Housing: Solar Power, whether she is taking planning-related steps to facilitate the fitting of solar panels in conservation areas.

**Matthew Pennycook:**

To facilitate the take up of renewable energy, nationally set permitted development rights enable the installation of solar equipment on or within the curtilage of buildings, including in conservation areas, without the need to submit a planning application. The rights are subject to certain conditions and limitations to protect local amenity. Proposals which go beyond what is allowed under the rights will require a planning application. Any such applications will be considered on their individual merits. We will continue to keep permitted development rights under review.

## JUSTICE

### ■ Asylum and Immigration: Tribunals

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[15249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many Independent Social Workers are recognised by the Tribunal system as qualified to provide independent reports in immigration cases.

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[15250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the cost to the asylum and immigration tribunal system was of commissioning reports from Independent Social Workers in each of the last five years.

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[15251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many reports were produced by Independent Social Workers for the immigration and asylum tribunals in the last year for which data is available.

**Neil O'Brien:** [\[15252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many reports were produced by Independent Social Workers for the immigration and asylum tribunals which recommended that a person liable to be removed from the UK should be allowed to stay in the last year for which data is available.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Immigration and Asylum Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal is independent of government and act as impartial arbiters of the evidence presented by Appellants and the Home Office as Respondent to appeals. The Tribunal does not establish verification systems for any experts called by either party. Regulation of Social

workers is overseen by Social Work England, Scottish Social Services Council, Social Care Wales and Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

Similarly, the Tribunal does not commission reports from parties and accordingly bears no cost.

The information requested on reports produced for either party on an appeal is not held centrally. HMCTS does not hold data on the number of expert reports that may have been entered into evidence by a party, the classification of the expert, the conclusions of that expert or whether those conclusions contradict or support the conclusions of the Home Office.

Judges weigh the opinions of experts and make their decisions based on all of the collective evidence including any expert reports that may be provided, but they are not bound to accept conclusions in those reports.

## ■ Courts: Fines

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[15370\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an estimate of the total amount written off in court fine accounts for each of the last 10 years.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Financial penalties imposed by the courts will often consist of multiple elements including, amongst others, compensation, victim surcharge, prosecutor's costs and a fine.

The Government takes the recovery and enforcement of all financial impositions very seriously and remains committed to ensuring impositions are paid. The courts will do everything within their powers to trace those who do not pay and use a variety of sanctions to ensure the recovery of criminal fines and financial penalties.

In very limited scenarios, HMCTS may decide to administratively write-off the debt, the circumstances in which this can happen are severely restricted and occur only when there is no opportunity for the debt to be collected, for example, when a company has been dissolved with no distributable assets. The debt is written off for administrative purposes only, the imposition is still legally enforceable and if in the future it becomes apparent that assets are available to pay the debt then the account is written back. There also remain specific and limited situations where the Court can legally cancel any debt.

The table below details the net value of the fine element of an imposition that has been administratively written off/ (written back - reinstated) for each financial year from 2014-15 to 2023-24. Judicial cancellations are not included as these are a direct instruction from the court to amend the value of the imposition.

| FINANCIAL YEAR | NET FINE IMPOSITIONS WRITTEN OFF/ (WRITTEN BACK) IN EACH YEAR £000 |
|----------------|--|
| 2014-15        | 45,345   |
| 2015-16        | 29,728   |
| 2016-17        | (17,728)   |
| 2017-18        | (44,441)   |
| 2018-19        | (8,332)  |
| 2019-20        | 9,458  |
| 2020-21        | 8,797  |
| 2021-22        | 8,480  |
| 2022-23        | 12,143   |
| 2023-24        | 9,400  |

#### ■ Courts: Interpreters

**Rupert Lowe:**

[\[15368\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of court cases have required a translator for each of the last 10 years.

**Heidi Alexander:**

The information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

#### ■ Justices' clerks: Telford

**Shaun Davies:**

[\[16272\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many court clerks have worked at Telford Magistrates Court for each year that data is available.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

| YEAR      | NO OF LEGAL ADVISORS   |
|-----------|--|
| 2023/2024 | 4 Legal Advisors based at Telford (which includes a Trainee Legal Advisor) |
| 2022/2023 | 4 Legal Advisors based at Telford (which includes a Trainee Legal Advisor) |

| YEAR      | NO OF LEGAL ADVISORS  |
|-----------|---|
| 2021/2022 | 4 Legal Advisors based at Telford (including a Trainee Legal Advisor) |
| 2020/2021 | 4 Legal Advisors based at Telford                                     |
| 2019/2020 | 4 Legal Advisors based at Telford                                     |
| 2018/2019 | 4 Legal Advisors based at Telford                                     |

HMCTS employs Legal Advisors, rather than clerks, to support magistrates in court and therefore this response is based on the number of Legal Advisors routinely based at Telford Magistrates Court from 2018 to 2024. On the occasions that the Crown Court is listed to sit at the court, a Crown Court clerk will also work there.

#### ■ Legal Aid: Shropshire

**Shaun Davies:**

[\[16270\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what data her Department holds on the number of (a) criminal legal aid firms and (b) duty solicitors contracted to provide legal aid in (i) Shropshire and (ii) Telford constituency for each year data is available.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) is responsible for commissioning legal aid services in England and Wales.

The commissioning and monitoring of criminal legal aid services are undertaken at a national level.

Information about the number of legal aid providers contracted to provide services are published as part of the [LAA's statistics](#) [see tables 9.1-9.8]. These statistics are used by the LAA as management information to monitor the supply of legal aid services over time, in different areas of law and different regions of England Wales.

The duty schemes serving the Shropshire and Telford constituency are the Shrewsbury and Telford schemes. There are currently 13 duty solicitors (members) in the Shrewsbury scheme, 8 duty solicitors in the Telford scheme and a total of 7 criminal legal providers across Shropshire.

The LAA is satisfied that there is adequate provision of criminal legal aid services in Telford and Shropshire, including under the relevant duty solicitor schemes operating in the area.

## ■ Magistrates' Courts: Telford

**Shaun Davies:**

[\[16273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what outstanding money was owed by defendants in (a) court fines, (b) prosecution costs, and (c) victim related costs at Telford Magistrates for each year data is available.

**Heidi Alexander:**

The information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Although HMCTS holds data on the total amount of impositions outstanding at an enforcement accounting division level, we do not report on it at an individual court level. To access the court level detail, each account in that division's database would need to be interrogated to find the cases heard at Telford Magistrates and then the outstanding balances extracted, collated and totalled and this would therefore result in disproportionate cost.

## ■ Prisoners

**Kim Johnson:**

[\[15952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of Parole Board decisions on (a) moving prisoners to open conditions, and (b) releasing prisoners were overruled by the Government in each of the last (i) 12 months, and (ii) 5 years.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The transfer of an indeterminate sentence prisoner to open conditions is a categorisation decision for the Secretary of State. However, historically, before approving transfer the Secretary of State has sought the advice of the Parole Board. Even where the Parole Board recommends that a prisoner is suitable for open conditions, the Secretary of State has a discretion as to whether to accept the recommendation. Pursuant to the practice of seeking the Parole Board's advice, the Secretary of State has published a policy to indicate where s/he will be likely to accept the Board's recommendation.

Up until June 2022, the HM Prison & Probation Service Policy Framework stipulated that the Secretary of State (or an official with delegated responsibility) would accept a recommendation from the Parole Board except where:

- the panel's recommendation goes against the clear recommendation of report writers without providing a sufficient explanation as to why; or
- the panel's recommendation is based on inaccurate information.

The Policy Framework stated that the Secretary of State might also reject a Parole Board recommendation if it is considered that there is not a wholly persuasive case for transferring the prisoner to open conditions at this time.

For the period June 2022 to July 2023, the Policy Framework stipulated that the Secretary of State (or an official with delegated responsibility) would accept a recommendation from the Parole Board only where:

- the prisoner is assessed as low risk of abscond; and
- a period in open conditions is considered essential to inform future decisions about release and to prepare for possible release on licence into the community; and
- a transfer to open conditions would not undermine public confidence in the Criminal Justice System.

The Policy Framework and associated guidance were updated on 17 July and has been applied to all outstanding Parole Board recommendations at that date and all recommendations received after that date. Under the terms of the Policy, the Secretary of State (or an official with delegated responsibility) will accept a recommendation from the Parole Board (to approve an ISP for open conditions) only where:

- the prisoner has made sufficient progress during the sentence in addressing and reducing risk to a level consistent with protecting the public from harm (in circumstances where the prisoner in open conditions may be in the community, unsupervised under licensed temporary release); and
- the prisoner is assessed as low risk of abscond; and
- there is a wholly persuasive case for transferring the ISP to open conditions.

Below is a breakdown of how many times the Secretary of State for Justice has accepted and not accepted the Parole Board's recommendation to move prisoners to open conditions in the last five calendar years

| YEAR | ACCEPTED | NOT ACCEPTED | TOTAL | % OF RECOMMENDATIONS REJECTED |
|------|----------|--------------|-------|-------------------------------|
| 2019 | 596      | 16           | 612   | 3%                            |
| 2020 | 617      | 27           | 644   | 4%                            |
| 2021 | 534      | 36           | 570   | 6%                            |
| 2022 | 99       | 156          | 255   | 61%                           |
| 2023 | 260      | 259          | 519   | 50%                           |

There is no current power for the Government to overrule a Parole Board release decision. The Lord Chancellor has decided to proceed with implementation of the referral power in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 which will give the Secretary of State the ability to directly refer certain Parole Board decisions in 'top tier' cases to the High Court for a second look. 'Top tier' cases include certain offenders convicted of murder, rape, terrorism, or terrorism connected offences, or causing or allowing the death of a child. This power will create a new role for the High Court to conduct risk assessments and hearings along similar lines to the Parole Board, to decide whether the statutory test for release has been met in the cases referred to it.

## ■ Prisoners' Release

**Ian Lavery:** [\[15425\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what proportion of prison leavers are recalled to prison for (a) breach of licence conditions and (b) other behaviour.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Details of the number of offenders released and those recalled, including the reasons for recall, are published quarterly [Offender management statistics quarterly - GOV.UK](#).

The Government's absolute focus is on public protection. Offenders on licence can be swiftly recalled to prison if they breach their licence conditions.

## ■ Prisoners Release: Homelessness

**Ian Lavery:** [\[15747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisoners were released without details held of a fixed address in the last 12 months.

**Ian Lavery:** [\[15748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many people who reoffended were homeless in each of the last three years.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Accommodation outcomes for prison leavers are recorded against the categories of settled accommodation, other housed, bail/probation accommodation, homeless (not rough sleeping) and rough sleeping, rather than 'no fixed address'. Outcomes against these accommodation categories in 2023-24 can be found in Table 2 of the 'Housed on Release from Custody Data Tables' which form part of the Offender Accommodation Outcomes publication ([Offender Accommodation Outcomes, update to March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)). The notes that accompany the tables provide definitions for each accommodation category.

Data on the number of people who re-offended who are homeless are published as part of the Proven Reoffending Quarterly Statistics Bulletin. Details can be found in Table C3 at the link below:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/671f7c4b34853837d7fc4097/proven-reoffending-oct22-dec22-3-monthly.ods>.

Prison leavers at risk of becoming homeless and who are supervised by probation can be offered up to 12 weeks of basic accommodation on release by HM Prisons and Probation Service, with support to move to settled accommodation. This programme has been gradually rolled out nationwide since July 2021 and since then has supported over 12,200 prison leavers who would otherwise have been homeless.

**■ Prisons: Education****Rupert Lowe:** [\[15390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an estimate of the (a) number and (b) total cost to the public purse of courses available to inmates at (i) HMP Maidstone, (ii) HMP Huntercombe and (iii) HMP Morton Hall for the last financial year.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

In 2023-24, 23 education courses were provided at HMP Maidstone, 26 at HMP Huntercombe and 48 at HMP Morton Hall.

Data on the cost of providing these courses at HMP Huntercombe and HMP Morton Hall are in the process of validation. Information in relation to HMP Maidstone is not available, as the costs form part of a single budget item covering a number of prisons and cannot be disaggregated.

Courses, such as the ones offered at these sites, are one of many valuable ways in which we can improve rehabilitation and cut reoffending which costs society more than £18 billion per year.

**■ Prisons: Standards****Ian Lavery:** [\[15424\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisons were rated good for rehabilitation and release planning by inspectors from April 2023 to April 2024.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

This Government has inherited a prison system in crisis, and this has been reflected in the inspections conducted by His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons. Between 1 April 2023 and 30 April 2024. Prior to the arrival of the current Government, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons published eight adult prison inspection reports that scored 'good' against the preparation for release (formally rehabilitation and release planning) Healthy Prison Test (HPT) and one under 18 establishment received a score of 'good' against the equivalent youth HPT outcome of resettlement. This is out of a total of 49 published inspections during that period.

**■ Probation: Staff****Ian Lavery:** [\[15427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many probation officers work in the justice system.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

Information on staffing numbers of directly employed staff in HM Prison and Probation Service in England and Wales is published quarterly on GOV.UK.

The most recent data can be found at: [HM Prison & Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2024 - GOV.UK](#).



## ■ Probation: Standards

**Ian Lavery:**

[\[15429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to improve probation services.

**Sir Nicholas Dakin:**

The Probation Service plays a crucial role in protecting the public and reducing reoffending. We are strengthening probation by building a supported, skilled and resilient workforce that can deliver high quality supervision, focused on the areas of highest risk, and delivered within manageable caseloads. In recognition of this, we are onboarding at least 1,000 new trainee Probation Officers by the end of March 2025, diversifying entry pathways into the service, and supporting targeted recruitment campaigns to boost applications for key roles and reduce hiring time.

The Government is committed to learning from successful examples of local partnerships, supporting the whole service to improve join-up and deliver better outcomes. We are continuously assessing the service and are prepared to take further steps to support the service to deliver, including exploring how technology can be used improve efficiency.

## ■ Reparation by Offenders

**Mr Paul Kohler:**

[\[16049\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps she is taking to increase awareness of restorative justice throughout the criminal justice system.

**Mr Paul Kohler:**

[\[16050\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will issue an updated Restorative Justice Action Plan.

**Alex Davies-Jones:**

This Government supports the use of restorative justice. We know that restorative justice can improve victim satisfaction and reduce reoffending when delivered in the right circumstances. This not only benefits the victims and the offender but also their community.

This is why, under the Victims' Code, all adult victims must be told about the option of restorative justice and how to access it. The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 has the potential to improve awareness of and compliance with the Victims' Code, by making sure that victims know about their rights in the Victims' Code and that agencies deliver them. But there is more to do to ensure the system and agencies that support victims can be held to account. That is why we will go further and increase the powers of the Victims' Commissioner, to ensure there is more accountability where the needs of victims are not being met.

Under a devolved model of commissioning, we also provide Police and Crime Commissioners with grant funding for victim support services, including restorative justice services. They are best placed to assess local need and commission services

based on the needs of the population in the local area. Therefore, we currently have no plans for a national action plan.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### ■ Voting Rights: Young People

**Sorcha Eastwood:** [\[15683\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he plans to introduce votes at 16 before (a) elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and (b) local elections take place.

**Hilary Benn:**

This Government will legislate to lower the voting age to 16 during this Parliament. This change will strengthen our democracy and empower young people to participate in it.

**Sorcha Eastwood:** [\[15687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the introduction of votes at 16 in Northern Ireland.

**Hilary Benn:**

The introduction of votes at 16 will be a major change to the franchise. I will of course work closely with my Ministerial counterparts across Government and other stakeholders on the development and implementation of this change.

## SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

### ■ Animal Experiments

**Chris Evans:** [\[15177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent discussions he has had with (a) industry, (b) civil society and (c) other relevant stakeholders on facilitating the end of animal testing.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Government is committed to supporting alternative methods to the use of animals in science and the Labour Manifesto included a commitment to “partner with scientists, industry, and civil society as we work towards the phasing out of animal testing.” The Government has already held roundtables with stakeholders from businesses, regulators and across Government on how to best support the uptake, validation and development of alternative methods, and further discussions with civil society organisations will take place in December.

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[15312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to paragraph 4.94 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC295, published on 30 October 2024, whether any of the core research funding will be used for projects that involve experimenting on animals.

**Feryal Clark:**

Alternative methods cannot currently replicate the complexity of an intact biological system, so the use of animals remains essential both in basic and translational medical research and in preclinical testing. Currently 32% of Medical Research Council-funded research programmes involve some use of animals licensed under the ASPA (Animals Scientific Procedures Act). The manifesto committed the Government to partner with scientists, industry, and civil society as we work towards the phasing out of animal testing. This is a long-term goal, and it will likely take many years of scientific and technical advancement and validation to reach this point.

■ **Broadband: Advertising**

**Kevin Hollinrake:**

[\[15196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he intends to meet with the Advertising Standards Authority to discuss the advertising of part-copper broadband as fibre.

**Chris Bryant:**

I refer the right Hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton to the answer of 21 November to question [UIN 14700](#).

■ **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Consultants**

**Dan Carden:**

[\[15522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much his Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Feryal Clark:**

DSIT was created by a Machinery of Government (MOG) change on 7 February 2023, we have not provided data prior to DSIT becoming a fully operational department. Departmental Group consultancy spend in financial year 23-24, as disclosed in 2023-24 Annual report & Accounts (ARA), was £24.0 million.

We recognise the Government is committed to restoring the public finances and delivering value for the taxpayer. As part of this wider mission, the Government has pledged to reduce wasteful spend on non-essential and expensive consultants in order to save over £1.2 billion by 2026.

**■ Government Digital Service: Fujitsu****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[15227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department has made an assessment of the value for money of its contract with Fujitsu Services Ltd for the GDS Digital Service Platforms One Login project prior to agreeing that contract in July 2024.

**Feryal Clark:**

The GOV.UK One Login programme is subject to regular scrutiny and reporting to assess and ensure project objectives have been met, including through the Government Major Projects Portfolio. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority has provided positive reviews of GOV.UK One Login for the last three years. The programme is also working with the Evaluation Task Force to publish a comprehensive evaluation plan which will assess the programme's key objectives.

The [GOV.UK](#) One Login programme has not had a contract with Fujitsu Services Ltd.

**■ Innovation and Research****Adam Jogee:**[\[15329\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of research and development on the Government's growth agenda.

**Feryal Clark:**

R&D is fundamental to achieving the Government's mission of kickstarting economic growth and we know businesses grow faster because of science and innovation. In the 6 years after receiving their first R&D grant funding, employment increases in the average business by 21% and turnover grows by 23%.

That is why the government is investing record amounts into R&D, with total government investment in R&D rising to a record £20.4 billion in 2025/26. This investment also supports our research base and underpins the innovations and technological advancements that will help the UK boost productivity and create high-paid jobs.

We are ensuring R&D supports the government's five missions, via such vehicles as the R&D Missions Programme. Through this, R&D is at the heart of our agenda to boost growth and improve lives by maximising the potential of science and technology.

**Adam Jogee:**[\[15330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of science and innovation on regional inequalities.

**Feryal Clark:**

Increasing productivity right across the UK is fundamental to our mission to kickstart economic growth. We know businesses grow faster because of science and

innovation. In the 6 years after receiving their first R&D grant funding, the average business increases employment by 21% and turnover by 23%. The Government will continue to support regional growth through the industrial strategy. As set out in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper, research, development, and innovation are essential to developing the UK's growth-driving sectors. The Government will explore how to build on existing place-based initiatives to support high-potential clusters.

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[15332\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of an international strategy for science and innovation.

**Feryal Clark:**

Science and innovation are fundamentally international endeavours, and the Government has an open-arms approach to international science. The Government's strategy is to strengthen ties with international partners and rebuild the UK's reputation as a strong, reliable partner, while harnessing the power of science and technology for global benefit. This includes making the most of the UK's association to Horizon Europe, as well as continuing to build wider international partnerships including through the International Science Partnerships Fund. The Government is also fully committed to attracting and retaining the very best scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs globally.

**Gregory Stafford:**

[\[15378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help protect the integrity of global research from authoritarian regimes.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Government wants the UK research sector to engage with all international partners, in a way that takes account of specific national security concerns, is compliant with the UK's security policies and regulations, and protects the integrity of global research.

As part of my department's proactive engagement with the research sector, the Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) provides tailored advice to universities on managing national security risks in international collaboration. The Government also offers published guidance through the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and National Protective Security Authority's (NPSA) Trusted Research.

## ■ Innovation and Research: Warwickshire

**Rachel Taylor:**

[\[15336\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to ensure adequate funding for (a) innovation and (b) development in technology in Warwickshire.

**Feryal Clark:**

UKRI invested £43 million in Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire in 2021-22.

This included core funding for the Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG), which is a centre of the High Value Manufacturing Catapult. WMG is a world-leading industrial research and education group that works with companies to boost the UK's manufacturing performance and sustainability.

Innovate UK's Launchpad programme is also allocating up to £7.5 million for the immersive and creative industries cluster centred on Coventry and Warwickshire. This is supporting thirteen projects, eleven of which are with small and medium sized business, to progress their ideas toward commercialisation and contribute to local economic growth.

**■ Innovation and Research: Defence****Adam Jogee:**[\[15333\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the role of science and innovation in the defence sector.

**Feryal Clark:**

Cutting-edge science, innovation and technology are central to modern defence and UK national security. DSIT is working closely with MOD to input into its Strategic Defence Review, to help MOD leverage the strengths of the UK S&T ecosystem to achieve its ambitions. This includes investments in future research breakthroughs and innovation to grow our technology sector, which also supports future defence needs. DSIT's teams regularly engage with cross-Government colleagues including Defence on the opportunities and risks of new technologies and are integrated into the relevant board structures for defence-related R&D. DSIT's Secretary of State speaks frequently to cabinet colleagues on issues of mutual importance.

**■ Innovation and Research: Devolution****Adam Jogee:**[\[15334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on (a) science and innovation and (b) research and development.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Secretary of State met with each of his ministerial counterparts in the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive.

These discussions have been highly constructive, in keeping with the Prime Minister's reset in relations with the Devolved Governments, and have revealed a number of areas of shared interest and scope for collaboration across the science, innovation and research portfolio.

The Secretary of State has also undertaken official visits to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including to Queen's University Belfast and the Smart Nano NI consortium in September.

### ■ Innovation and Research: Newcastle-under-Lyme

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[15331\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of science and innovation on job creation in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

**Feryal Clark:**

Science and innovation are vital to our mission to kickstart economic growth and create jobs in every part of the country.

For example, Research England invested £5 million into the HyDEX programme, which Keele University leads on behalf of the Midlands-based Energy Research Accelerator. This is helping build a Midlands hydrogen economy by working with established national businesses and accelerating local SMEs' work.

Through the Strength in Places Fund, UKRI invested £18.3 million in the "Midlands Advanced Ceramics for Industry 4.0" programme led by Staffordshire company Lucideon. This led the Applied Materials Research, Innovation, & Commercialisation Company to be established.

### ■ Innovation: Gloucester

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[15162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help increase levels of innovation in Gloucester.

**Feryal Clark:**

UK Research and Innovation invested £260 million in the Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Bath/Bristol area in 2021-22.

There are two active projects based in Gloucester, with a combined value of £218,000. This includes a £122,000 Horizon Europe Guarantee award, delivered by UKRI, to the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, supporting research to enable rural communities' actors and policy makers to design better strategies, initiatives and policies fostering sustainability transitions of rural areas. Also, £96,000 awarded to Hill Court Farm Research to provide farmers with a framework for improving nitrogen efficiency.

### ■ Medicine: Research

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[15311\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to paragraph 4.94 of of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC295, published on 30 October 2024,

what steps his Department is taking to support the development of human-specific technologies such as organ-on-a-chip.

**Feryal Clark:**

The Government funds research through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and many programmes, including those on organoids, cell behaviour or AI, may eventually lead to the development of human-specific technologies that can replace the need for the use of animals. The Government also funds the development and dissemination of techniques that replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research through the National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs). Since its launch in 2004, the NC3Rs has committed over £100 million through its research and innovation to provide new 3Rs approaches for scientists in academia and industry to use

■ **Project Gigabit and Shared Rural Network**

**Chi Onwurah:**

[\[16152\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 14940 on Project Gigabit and Shared Rural Network, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the minimum signal strength to support remote working.

**Chris Bryant:**

Ofcom reports that a 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload speed connection is needed to support video calls and a consistent connection to the internet, and our expectation is that this would support remote working. Most networks in the UK, including those delivered by Project Gigabit, offer much higher performance.

The mobile signal strength thresholds Ofcom set for the Shared Rural Network are based on Ofcom's assessment of what constitutes "good" mobile coverage which has been in place for several years and which broadly equates to successfully making a 90 second call and getting a download speed of at least 2Mbit/s. Whether this is sufficient to support remote working will depend on a number of factors, including the nature of the work being undertaken and the level of congestion on the network. We have asked Ofcom to keep under review what constitutes good 4G and 5G connectivity.

In response to my letter to their Chief Executive, Ofcom is considering how to incorporate different signal strength thresholds in its reporting on the availability of mobile networks.

■ **Technology: South Norfolk**

**Ben Goldsborough:**

[\[15557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to ensure that there is adequate funding for (a) innovation and (b) development in technology in South Norfolk constituency.

**Feryal Clark:**

In 2021/22, UKRI invested £478 million in East Anglia.



For example, Innovate UK's Launchpad programme is allocating up to £7.5 million to help SMEs in the East of England agri-tech and food technology cluster to grow. Norfolk County Council is one of the Launchpad's partners.

Other UKRI investments in the region include the [Next Generation Infrastructure](#) programme, delivered jointly by the [John Innes Centre](#) and [The Sainsbury Laboratory](#); and [the Earlham Institute](#) -coordinated [BioFAIR](#), which will establish a transformative digital research infrastructure for life sciences.

## TRANSPORT

### ■ **Avanti West Coast: North Wales**

**Andrew Ranger:**

[\[15491\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the performance of Avanti West Coast trains from stations in north Wales.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Secretary of State is clear that the performance of Avanti West Coast (AWC) on its North Wales route is not good enough with passengers facing too many cancellations and delays. Poor Network Rail (NR) infrastructure reliability has also contributed significantly to the disruption felt by passengers.

The Secretary of State met with the Managing Director of AWC and the NR West Coast South Route Director to challenge them on poor performance and demand immediate action to deliver urgent improvements. Officials continue to meet regularly with AWC and NR as part of a relentless focus on improving rail performance, bringing together track and train, and holding both sides accountable.

### ■ **Bus Services: Finance**

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[15318\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will publish the formula used to determine the final allocations for bus service improvement plan funding for local transport authorities for 2025-26.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The government has confirmed £955 million for the 2025 to 2026 financial year to support and improve bus services in England outside London. This includes £243 million for bus operators and £712 million allocated to local authorities across the country. Central Bedfordshire Council has been allocated £3 million of this funding.

Funding for local authorities to deliver their bus service improvement plans has been allocated based on local needs, including population, the distance that buses travel, and levels of deprivation.

**■ Bus Services: Lancashire****Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[15345\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of the increased bus fare cap on public transport use in Lancashire.

**Simon Lightwood:**

In the Budget on 30 October, the government confirmed it will invest over £150 million to introduce a new £3 cap on single bus fares in England outside London from 1 January until 31 December 2025. Under the plans of the previous administration, the current £2 cap on bus fares had been due to expire on 31 December 2024, and prior to the Budget, there was no further funding available to maintain the cap beyond this point.

The published interim evaluation of the £2 fare cap showed that patronage continued to recover following the COVID 19 pandemic. The final evaluation of the £2 fare cap will be published in due course.

Considering all its impacts, the fare cap is not financially sustainable for taxpayers and bus operators at £2. Capping fares at £3 will keep bus travel affordable while ensuring the cap is fair to taxpayers, helping millions of people access better opportunities, travel for less and protect vital bus routes, in Lancashire and right across England.

**■ Bus Services: Schools****Jerome Mayhew:**[\[15528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on the number of (a) employees working in the private school bus services sector and (b) privately contracted buses used by local authorities for school bus services.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Department for Transport does not hold specific data on the number of employees working in the private school bus services sector, or on the number of privately contracted buses used by local authorities for school bus services. Local authorities are responsible for arranging and managing these contracts, and they are best placed to provide information about the services they commission.

**■ Bus Services: South Norfolk****Ben Goldsborough:**[\[15558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate she has made of the potential impact of the bus fare cap on the average annual reduction in bus fares for people in South Norfolk constituency in each of the next three financial years.

**Simon Lightwood:**

In the Budget on 30 October, the government confirmed it will invest over £150 million to introduce a new £3 cap on single bus fares in England outside London from

1 January until 31 December 2025. Under the plans of the previous administration, the current £2 cap on bus fares had been due to expire on 31 December 2024, and prior to the Budget, there was no further funding available to maintain the cap beyond this point.

The published interim evaluation of the £2 fare cap showed that patronage continued to recover following the COVID 19 pandemic. The final evaluation of the £2 fare cap will be published in due course.

## ■ Buses and Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Young People

**Alex Mayer:** [\[15882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of removing the 50km restriction for 18- to 20-year-old bus and coach drivers on a regular service.

**Alex Mayer:** [\[15883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of removing the requirement to hold a provisional bus, coach or HGV licence to undertake the theory and off-road modules of the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence test.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

In April, the Department launched a consultation on amending licensing restrictions following requests from industry, the consultation ran for 8 weeks and closed on 5 June. It consulted on measures to amend licensing restrictions which would enable 18- to 20-year-olds to drive a bus and coach over 50km when driving a regular service and enable some of the tests required to be passed in order to gain a driver certificate of professional competence (DCPC) to be taken before a provisional licence is issued.

Officials are reviewing responses to the consultation and the Department will publish a response in due course.

## ■ Buses: Carbon Emissions

**Alex Mayer:** [\[15304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many buses funded through the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas scheme are UK-manufactured.

**Simon Lightwood:**

UK-based bus manufacturers have benefited the most from the Department's funding programmes, such as ZEBRA. It is estimated that 60% of ZEBRA-supported buses will be procured from UK-based manufacturers, supporting economic growth and jobs across the zero-carbon transport industry.

The transition to zero emission buses represents a great opportunity for UK bus manufacturers, both to supply the zero emission buses needed here in the UK and to win export orders abroad as other countries upgrade their bus fleets.

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[15317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many buses funded through the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas scheme (a) have been ordered and (b) are on the road.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Of the 2,263 buses funded through the ZEBRA 1 and 2 programmes 1,674 buses have been ordered (1,025 - ZEBRA 1 & 649 ZEBRA 2) whilst there are currently 582 ZEBs in service.

## ■ Cycling: Gloucester

**Alex McIntyre:**

[\[15588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to improve road safety for cyclists in Gloucester.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

This Government takes road safety very seriously and reducing those killed and injured on our roads is a key priority. The Highway Code was updated in 2022 to improve road safety for cyclists and pedestrians. The Hierarchy of Road Users was introduced, which places those road users most at risk in the event of a collision at the top of the hierarchy.

Since 2020-21, Gloucestershire County Council has been awarded over £23 million through the Active Travel Fund. This funding can be used by the authority for new segregated cycling facilities, improved junctions and upgrades to existing routes to improve safety. Over £1 million has been awarded to upgrade the National Cycle Network in Gloucestershire.

Earlier this year, Gloucestershire was allocated £462,000 to build capability and enable more people to walk and cycle safely under the Capability Fund. Additionally, 4,977 cycle training places were funded in 2023-24 as part of £224,000 of Bikeability funding.

## ■ Department for Transport: Consultants

**Dan Carden:**

[\[15514\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much her Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

**Mike Kane:**

The table shows the total departmental spend on consultancy for financial years 2020/2021 to 2023/2024. The total includes the central department (DfTc), Executive Agencies and Arm Length Bodies (ALBs).

Departmental total spend (£)

2020/21 175,720,840

2021/22 198,001,723

2022/23 225,477,742

2023/24 165,372,920

## ■ Driving Tests: Applications

**Sarah Olney:**

[\[15819\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help tackle the practice of reselling driving test slots.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

To ensure fairness for everyone wanting to book a practical driving test, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) continues to work hard to combat the unscrupulous practice of reselling tests.

DVSA deploys enhanced bot protection on its public facing booking system to stop automated systems from buying up tests unfairly. These applications, however, are constantly evolving and changing and DVSA continues to take steps to block cancellation services from accessing the booking system.

DVSA operates an online booking service (OBS) for Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) and trainers so that they can book and manage driving and riding tests for their pupils. DVSA has made changes to the OBS by stopping automatic online registrations to use the service, ensuring each company that registers employs an ADI and removing access for any companies not linked to driving instructors.

In January 2023, DVSA changed its booking service terms and conditions to help prevent anyone from selling tests at profit. Since then, the DVSA has issued 327 warnings, 779 suspensions, and closed 727 business accounts for misuse of its booking service.

## ■ Electric Bicycles

**Rachel Blake:**

[\[15321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with (a) local authorities and (b) organisations that represent local authorities on the use of dockless e-bikes.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The department works closely with local authorities and their representative organisations to deliver our shared transport objectives.

My officials regularly meet with local authority officials to discuss specific transport challenges and better understand how to identify and tackle problems that arise as well as how to make the most of opportunities. Dockless e-bikes are a good example of this.

I also correspond frequently with local leaders on the use of dockless e-bikes in their area and would like to take this opportunity to further encourage such dialogue. The experience and expertise shared by local authorities in correspondence with me and with officials is invaluable as I carefully consider the next steps on policy in this area.

**■ Electric Vehicles: Grants****Alex Mayer:** [\[15310\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reintroducing electric vehicle purchase grants for private owners.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Government already provides support for private owners looking to purchase zero emission vehicles, including generous taxation incentives and Plug-in Vehicle Grants for specific types of vehicles.

In the recent Budget, the Government announced £120m of new funding for next financial year to support the purchase of new electric vans via the Plug-in Van Grant and to support the manufacture of wheelchair accessible EVs.

**■ Euston Station: Bus Services****Alex Mayer:** [\[15303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with TFL on the location of the bus station at Euston station.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Department for Transport is working with key partners, including Transport for London, to develop affordable plans for the Euston Station Campus.

**■ London North Eastern Railway: WiFi****Chi Onwurah:** [\[16158\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 14 November to Question 13473 and the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 14457 on London North Eastern Railway: WiFi, whether complaints about WiFi are included in the category entitled facilities on board.

**Simon Lightwood:**

I can confirm that Wifi complaints fall into the "Quality on Train" - "Facilities on Board" category.

**■ Lower Thames Crossing****Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[15444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate her Department has made of the (a) cost of preparing and (b) length of the environmental impact assessment for the Lower Thames Crossing development consent order application.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

Due to the level of interdependency between the large number of different elements of the Lower Thames Crossing Development Consent Order (DCO) application, it is not possible to accurately attribute costs to the production of the individual

documents within it. However, the total amount spent on the planning process is £295.1million.

The Environmental Impact Assessment information submitted in 2022 as part of the Lower Thames Crossing DCO application comprised of approximately 12,000 pages.

## ■ Manchester Metrolink: Stockport

**Tom Morrison:**

[\[16258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she plans to fund a Metrolink extension to Stockport before the end of this Parliament.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Government is investing in transport improvements across our city regions, including Greater Manchester which is receiving over £1 billion through its City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement. In line with the Government's commitment to devolution, decisions on where to invest this funding, including whether to extend the Metrolink network, rest with Greater Manchester Combined Authority, in partnership with its constituent local authorities.

## ■ Network Rail

**Laurence Turner:**

[\[16372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to page 8 of the Network Rail publication entitled 2022 Delivery Plan Update: North West and Central, published in May 2022, what was the outturn proportion of investment milestones that were missed in that region in (a) 2022-23 and (b) 2023-24; and what were the investment milestones that were missed in that region by each item in (i) 2022-23 and (ii) 2023-24.

**Simon Lightwood:**

There were no milestones missed for (a) Financial Year 22/23. For (b) 23/24, the outturn as a percentage for missed milestones was 2%. The two missed milestones were:

- Worcester Shrub Hill Canopies, which was the delivery of the scope of buildings work

The programme was delayed by site access and safety issues, including visibility of signals and the scope of works was increased as the assets were in a worse condition than anticipated.

- The Three Arch bridge between Cuddington and Delamere stations, which was a renewal of a 3-span bridge.

Further inspection of the asset showed that it was not in as bad condition as expected and it was deemed an inefficient use of public funds to progress with the work.

**■ Northern Trains: Standards****Tom Morrison:** [\[16254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how often she meets senior leaders at Northern Rail to discuss its service delivery in the north of England.

**Simon Lightwood:**

Ministers, and officials from the Rail North Partnership have regular meetings with Northern's management team to discuss how to improve its current performance across its network.

**■ Pedicabs: Vetting****Rachel Blake:** [\[15322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will introduce advanced disclosure and barring service checks for pedicab drivers.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Pedicabs (London) Act 2024, which received Royal Assent on 25 April 2024, confers powers onto Transport for London (TfL) to regulate London's pedicab industry for the first time. TfL is preparing to consult on these prospective regulations, which will include enhanced disclosure and barring service checks for pedicab drivers.

**■ Public Transport: Care Leavers****Helen Hayes:** [\[15220\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that care leavers aged between 18 and 25 can access affordable public transport; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the English National Travel Concession Scheme to care leavers.

**Simon Lightwood:**

This government recognises the importance of supporting care leavers, and is keeping public transport affordable having announced a new £3 cap on single bus fares in England outside London throughout the entirety of 2025.

Any change to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) would require careful consideration for its impact on the scheme's financial sustainability. However, local authorities in England have implemented a wide range of their own local fares initiatives, including some discount schemes for care leavers, utilising alternative funding, such as Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding. On 17 November, the government confirmed £712 million funding for local authorities in 2025/26 to deliver their BSIPs and protect services, as part of an over £1 billion investment in buses confirmed at the Budget.



## ■ Railway Stations

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[15316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to support multi-modal interchanges at (a) HS2 Euston Station and (b) all other new stations.

**Lilian Greenwood:**

The Department for Transport is working with key partners to develop affordable plans for the Euston Station Campus, which will comprise the new HS2 station, an upgraded Network Rail station, and enhancements to the London Underground station and local transport facilities along with a significant level of development. The ease of interchange for passengers will always be a critical consideration.

At Old Oak Common, the new HS2 station will provide connectivity with Elizabeth Line, Heathrow Express and Great Western Railway services within the station itself. This will be supported by connections for buses, private hire vehicles and active travel routes outside the station building.

At Birmingham Curzon Street, the Department is working with HS2 Ltd and Transport for West Midlands on the integration of the Birmingham Eastside metro extension at the HS2 station. There will also be provision for bus stops, active travel routes, and bicycle storage.

At Interchange station, HS2 will construct an Automated People Mover which will connect the station to the National Exhibition Centre (NEC), Birmingham International railway station and Birmingham Airport. The design for the station also incorporates a bus interchange, short and long stay car parking, bicycle storage, and a network of active travel routes.

## ■ Railways: Franchises

**Alex Mayer:**

[\[15305\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment the Department has made of the level of passenger brand awareness of franchised rail operators.

**Simon Lightwood:**

The Department has not assessed the level of passenger brand awareness of franchised rail operators. The operating companies periodically test their own brand awareness as part of their own market research, but this information is not shared with the Department, nor is this research routinely conducted on a frequent basis.

## ■ Railways: WiFi

**Neil O'Brien:**

[\[15472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of wifi available across the rail network.

**Simon Lightwood:**

I have asked my officials to explore the feasibility of a range of technology options to improve passenger connectivity on the rail network. The Department is also conducting research to measure the strength of mobile signals along the rail network to fully understand where interventions are needed, and the potential impacts.

**TREASURY**■ **Employers Contributions****Neil O'Brien:**[\[16322\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 2.41 of the Autumn Budget, published on 24 October 2024, what estimate he has made of the potential cost to the public purse of the increase in the employment allowance in each year of the forecast period.

**James Murray:**

The Government has protected the smallest businesses from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500, which means that 865,000 employers will pay no NICs at all next year, more than half of employers will see no change or will gain overall from this package, and all eligible employers will be able to employ up to four full-time workers on the National Living Wage and pay no employer NICs.

The estimated cost of the increase to the Employment Allowance is set out in the table below:

| (£M)   | 2025-26 | 2026-27 | 2027-28 | 2028-29 | 2029-30 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Cost of increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500 | 3,730   | 3,555   | 3,570   | 3,600   | 3,630   |

■ **Employment: Policy****Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[15202\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her Department's definition of a working person is for the purposes of policy development.

**Darren Jones:**

A working person is someone who goes out to work and works for their income. The government has committed to not increase taxes on working people, protecting their payslips against higher taxes. This means no increase in the basic, higher or additional rates of Income Tax, Employee National Insurance contributions or VAT.

## ■ High Speed 2 Line: Finance

**Tonia Antoniazzi:**

[\[15258\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the merits of the application of the Barnett formula in Wales, in the context of HS2 spending.

**Darren Jones:**

The Barnett formula is simple, efficient and provides a clear and certain outcome. This is why it has stood the test of time.

The result of Barnett formula is that the Welsh Government is receiving at least 20% more funding per person than equivalent UK Government spending in the rest of the UK. That translates into over £4 billion more in 2025-26.

HS2 is a heavy rail programme. The UK Government is responsible for heavy rail infrastructure across England and Wales, so spends money on this in Wales rather than funding the Welsh Government to do so through the Barnett formula. This approach is consistent with the funding arrangements for all other policy areas reserved in Wales, as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

The Government remains committed to heavy rail schemes in Wales, by providing funding for both operations, maintenance and infrastructure, and enhancement schemes such as modernising Cardiff Central Station.

## ■ Ministers: Codes of Practice

**Mike Wood:**

[\[15194\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Speaker's Statement of 28 October 2024, Official Report, column 531, whether she has made an assessment of the compatibility of those fiscal policy announcements with paragraph 9.1 of the Ministerial Code.

**Darren Jones:**

The announcement on the changes made to the debt fiscal rules was made in the Budget statement on 30th October.

**Mr Richard Holden:**

[\[15238\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the compliance of the announcement of the new debt rules to the media first with section 9.1 of the Ministerial code.

**Darren Jones:**

The announcement on the changes made to the debt fiscal rules was made in the Budget statement on 30th October.

**■ Social Services: National Insurance Contributions**

**Alison Bennett:** [\[16113\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has made an estimate of the number of social care providers affected by the increase in employers National Insurance contributions.

**Alison Bennett:** [\[16114\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of the (a) overall cost to businesses in the social care sector of the increase in employers National Insurance contributions and (b) average cost to each business in this sector.

**Alison Bennett:** [\[16115\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of the number of businesses in the social care sector that will pay the increase in employers National Insurance contributions (a) nationally and (b) in each constituency.

**Alison Bennett:** [\[16116\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of how much businesses in the social care sector will pay as a result of the increase in employers National Insurance contributions (a) nationally and (b) in each constituency.

**James Murray:**

A Tax Information and Impact Note that covers the Employer National Insurance changes was published by HMRC on 13 November.

The Government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional Employer National Insurance costs. This does not include support for the private sector, including private sector firms contracted by central or local government.

This is the usual approach Government takes to supporting the public sector with additional Employer National Insurance contributions as was the case with the previous Government's Health and Social Care Levy.

The government considered the cost pressures facing adult social care and wider local government spending as part of the Budget process in the usual way.

The government is providing a real-terms increase in core local government spending power of around 3.2% in 2025-26, including at least £600m of new grant funding provided to social care, which can be used to address the range of pressures facing the sector.

**■ Workplace Pensions: Interest Rates**

**Steff Aquarone:** [\[16307\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to support those asked to pay large interest payments on pension contributions as a result of the McCloud judgement.

**Darren Jones:**

The purpose of the McCloud remedy is to ensure affected public service pension scheme members are put back into the same position they would have been if the discrimination identified by the Court of Appeal in 2018 had not occurred. It is therefore necessary to apply interest to payments to members or the scheme that would otherwise have been made at an earlier time. Members who need to pay a contribution adjustment can choose whether to make payment after receiving their Remediable Saving Statement or to defer until their retirement. Scheme managers also have scope to support members, for example by allowing payments to be spread over time.

**WOMEN AND EQUALITIES****■ Assistance Animals: Business Premises****Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[15568\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that businesses comply with the Equality Act 2010 by allowing people with sight loss to enter their premises with an assistance dog.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

Under the Equality Act 2010, businesses and public bodies that provide goods and services to the public must not unlawfully discriminate against disabled people, including those with assistance dogs.

The Act places a duty on service providers to make reasonable adjustments to improve access to premises, buildings and services. This could include allowing the use of assistance dogs so that disabled customers are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled customers.

This is an anticipatory duty, meaning businesses should expect that some customers will have assistance dogs and should put in place arrangements to assist their access. Failure to do so could ultimately leave the service provider open to legal action by the disabled person.

To help businesses comply with the law and disabled customers know their rights, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has published a range of guidance and codes of practice, for all to consult.

**■ Equal Pay: Gender****Adam Jogee:**[\[15327\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of a cross-Government strategy to close the gender pay gap.

**Adam Jogee:**

[\[15328\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of closing the gender pay gap on women who (a) live, (b) learn and (c) work in Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

According to the most recent ONS assessment, the median gender pay gap for all UK employees is 13.1% in April 2024. We are committed to going further and faster to close the gender pay gap. There are a number of measures within our landmark Employment Rights Bill which will support us in this ambition, and which will have a positive impact on women across the country.

In relation to my Hon. Friend's constituency, the most recent ONS assessment states that the median gender pay gap for all employees who live in the constituency in April 2024 is 9.4%, down from 19.8 last year\*, and significantly lower than the national figure.

*\*ONS recommend comparing GPG figures over the longer term. ONS publish GPG data back to 1997 however, the home parliamentary constituency table was published later. Given the small number of people in any parliamentary constituency included in the GPG calculations, ONS also produces a rating of the quality of this data. 2004 was the earliest that Newcastle-under-Lyme's GPG data was published and considered of "reasonable quality."*

## ■ Office for Equality and Opportunity: Gender and Sexuality

**Alex Burghart:**

[\[15471\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether the Office for Equality and Opportunity formally recognises any (a) genders, (b) sexual orientations and (c) gender identities.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

There is no list of genders, sexual orientations or gender identities formally recognised by the Office for Equality and Opportunity.

## ■ Private Sector: Pay

**Jo Platt:**

[\[15656\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether her Department is taking steps to help reduce pay inequalities based on class in the private sector.

**Jo Platt:**

[\[15657\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether the Office for Equality and Opportunity is taking steps to measure links between differences in pay and the socioeconomic background of employees.

**Anneliese Dodds:**

We are committed to delivering better life chances for all - breaking the link between background and success. At the Budget, the Chancellor announced increases to both the National Minimum Wage (16.3% for those aged 18-20) and the National Living Wage (6.7% for those 21 and over), as well as a £240 million Get Britain Working package to improve support for people who are economically inactive, unemployed or want to develop their careers. Through our Mission-driven Government, we will build the skills people need for opportunity and growth.

This Government will also, at last, commence the socio-economic duty in section 1 of the [Equality Act 2010](#). The duty will require public bodies, when making strategic decisions, to actively consider how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage. We will be updating Parliament on this in due course.

**WORK AND PENSIONS****■ Employment: Endometriosis and Periods****Marie Goldman:**[\[15388\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure problems arising from menstrual health conditions, such as endometriosis, are accepted by employers as justified workplace absences.

**Alison McGovern:**

Officials from the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office for Equality and Opportunity met with Endometriosis UK to discuss the development of Equality Action Plans on 13th November 2024.

On 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024 the Government appointed Mariella Frostrup as the new Menopause Employment Ambassador. The Menopause Employment Ambassador will work closely with employers across the country to improve workplace support for women experiencing menopause and wider women's health issues including menstrual health conditions.

This appointment comes as the government has proposed a wide-ranging set of generational reforms to boost protections for workers. The Employment Rights Bill is the first phase of delivering the Government's plan to Make Work Pay, supporting workers through strengthening statutory sick pay, making flexible working the default, and requiring large employers to produce equality action plans.

**■ Hydrogen****Sir Alec Shelbrooke:**[\[15432\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in the Health and Safety Executive are evaluating the safety case for blending hydrogen in the transmission network; and what the Health and Safety Executive's planned timetable is for a decision.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has a strategic objective to enable industry to innovate safely to prevent major incidents, supporting the move towards Net Zero. As part of this objective HSE is working to review and understand key technologies, such as hydrogen and carbon capture and storage.

HSE is currently reviewing the evidence on safety for the potential use of 100% hydrogen as an alternative to natural gas. HSE understands that the full evidence base for blending hydrogen in the transmission network is not due to be completed until December 2024. HSE is working with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to ensure HSE's resources are appropriately deployed to support Government's net zero priorities.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Deductions**

**Rupert Lowe:**[\[15366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what is the total amount deducted from benefit payments to pay for claimants' court imposed fines each year for the ten previous years.

**Andrew Western:**

**Table 1 provides the total amount deducted from Universal Credit payments to repay a Court Fine debt for each financial year from April 2018 to August 2024.**

**TABLE 1: THE TOTAL AMOUNT DEDUCTED FROM UNIVERSAL CREDIT PAYMENTS FOR COURT FINES, APRIL 2018 TO AUGUST 2024**

| <b>Financial Years</b> | <b>Total Amount Deducted for Court Fines</b> |
|------------------------|--|
| Apr-18 to Mar-19       | £2,000,000                                   |
| Apr-19 to Mar-20       | £49,000,000                                  |
| Apr-20 to Mar-21       | £95,000,000                                  |
| Apr-21 to Mar-22       | £52,000,000                                  |
| Apr-22 to Mar-23       | £45,000,000                                  |
| Apr-23 to Mar-24       | £58,000,000                                  |
| Apr-24 to Aug-24       | £28,000,000                                  |

*Notes:*

- 1. Monetary amounts have been rounded to the nearest million.*
- 2. Court fines are classed as a Third Party Deduction. Data for Third Party Deductions is incomplete before April 2018, so we can't provide data for earlier years.*



3. *Data up to August 2024 has been provided in line with the latest available UC Deductions Statistics.*
4. *Data for 2018/19 only includes Universal Credit full service claims. Data on Universal Credit live service for 2018/19 is not available. In May 2016 the Universal Credit full service for all claimant types began to rollout nationally and was completed by the end of 2018.*
5. *Comparison across the different financial years is problematic due to changes in the deductions policy for Universal Credit, which would have affected the number of households having a third party deduction.*
6. *Figures have been provided for Universal Credit households in Great Britain. Northern Ireland claims are administered by the Department for Communities.*
7. *Figures are provisional and are subject to retrospective change as later data becomes available.*
8. *The methodology used is different to those used to derive the Official Statistics Household series and therefore, figures may not be comparable.*

#### ■ Social Security Benefits: Disability

**Jon Trickett:**

**[15723]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the cost to the public purse of disability benefits in (a) 2025 and (b) 2026.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

Forecast expenditure on Disability benefits are only available by financial year, in 2025/26 they're forecast to be £43.8 billion, and £46.4 billion in 2026-27. (Figures quoted in real terms based on 2024/25 prices).

Disability benefits expenditure covers Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Armed Forces Independence Payment, and Attendance Allowance. Full details of this expenditure can be found in the published [Outturn and Forecast Tables](#).

**Danny Kruger:**

**[15911]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what her planned timetable is for responding to her Department's closed consultation entitled Modernising support for independent living: the health and disability green paper, published on 29 April 2024.

**Sir Stephen Timms:**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 October 2024 to question number 6515. The answer can be found here: [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).

## WRITTEN STATEMENTS

### BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) Minister of State (Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security) (Mr Douglas Alexander):** [\[HCWS267\]](#)

On 27-28 November 2024, I attended the eighth meeting of the Commission of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in Vancouver, Canada, where a number of issues were considered by CPTPP Ministers.

#### **Future Accessions to CPTPP**

At the meeting, a formal Commission Decision was taken to commence a CPTPP accession process with Costa Rica via establishment of an Accession Working Group (AWG).

CPTPP Ministers have reaffirmed on several instances that CPTPP is open to Accession Requests by economies that can satisfy the 'Auckland Principles', namely; i) preparedness to meet the Agreement's high standards; ii) a demonstrated pattern of complying with trade commitments; and iii) recognition that decisions are dependent on the consensus of the CPTPP Parties.

Through extensive discussions and deliberations on all accession requests, the UK and other CPTPP Members have identified that Costa Rica can satisfy the three Auckland Principles. As such, in Vancouver, CPTPP Ministers formally decided to commence the accession process with Costa Rica and establish an Accession Working Group.

This move demonstrates that CPTPP remains a living agreement, and one which is designed to expand and bring in new high standards economies. Over time this expansion process will grow the global reach of the agreement, creating further opportunities for CPTPP Members.

It is expected that the first AWG meeting will take place in the first half of 2025, during Australia's year as CPTPP Chair. The UK will continue to work with CPTPP Members to consider and discuss the remaining Accession Requests in accordance with the Auckland Principles, and the establishment of an AWG for Costa Rica will not prevent this process.

To ensure that interested stakeholders are provided the opportunity to feed in views on the accession process of Costa Rica, today the Department for Business and Trade will launch a period of public engagement that will run across 8 weeks, closing on 24 January 2025. During this period, we will ask stakeholders what issues they would like us to consider when engaging in discussions on whether Costa Rica should join CPTPP and the terms on which they should join. The link to the public engagement questionnaire can be found here: [https://ditresearch.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_2bnop4ZwgdoyNVk](https://ditresearch.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2bnop4ZwgdoyNVk).

#### **CPTPP General Review**

In addition to discussing future accessions, CPTPP Ministers also discussed progress on the CPTPP General Review during the meeting in Vancouver. The Joint Ministerial Statement (known as the “Vancouver Statement”) published following the meeting summarises the progress made in 2024, during the first phase of the General Review, and sets out the forward workplan for 2025. In 2025 members will deepen their discussions on whether and how the agreement should be revised or updated to remain relevant to the trade and investment issues and challenges we all face today, including in a number of areas of particular interest to the UK. The Vancouver Statement can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cptpp-joint-ministerial-statement-in-vancouver-canada-28-november-2024>.

The Department for Business and Trade has also today published a factual summary of responses received to the public engagement period on the General Review which was carried out from January to February 2024. These responses continue to inform our ongoing engagement in the General Review.

### **Entry into force**

CPTPP Ministers at the meeting also warmly welcomed the impending Entry into Force of the agreement for the UK. In that vein, I would like to take this opportunity to confirm that the UK will accede to CPTPP on 15 December 2024 and that the Agreement will come into force on this date with Japan, Singapore, Chile, New Zealand, Vietnam, Peru, Malaysia and Brunei. Australia also recently ratified the UK’s Accession Protocol, on 25 October 2024, which means the agreement will enter into force with Australia on 24 December 2024. The deal will come into force with the remaining Parties 60 days after they each ratify.

When the UK accedes, the CPTPP will become a truly global trade deal, bringing new opportunities for British businesses, supporting jobs across the entire UK, and shaping the future of international trading rules.

## **CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**

### **■ BBC funding model work, licence fee uplift, and Simple Payment Plan**

**Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** [\[HCWS269\]](#)

The Government is today providing an update on the short and long-term funding of the BBC.

The BBC is a vital British asset and makes a huge contribution to lives up and down the country. It supports our democracy, brings our communities together, and helps to shape and define our nation through telling stories about the lives of people in all parts of the UK. Continuing to make that contribution, and deliver the obligations placed upon it, requires that the BBC receives ongoing and sustainable public funding.

As the media landscape undergoes the next generational shift, the BBC too must adapt and be supported to do so. The forthcoming Charter Review is a key opportunity to set the BBC up for success long into the future. It will look at a range of issues and, as a

priority for this Government, will start a national conversation to make sure the BBC truly represents and delivers for every person in this country. Charter Review will also look to uphold the BBC's independence and ensure that it maintains the trust of the public.

As we address these vital issues about the future form of the BBC, we must also ensure that there is a sustainable funding model that is fair for those who pay for it. The Government is keeping an open mind about the future of the licence fee, but we are clear that the BBC's funding and its operation are inseparable. As such, we will not be progressing the BBC Funding Model Review set up by the previous Government, and we are disbanding the expert panel set up to support that review, to whom we are grateful for their previous input.

In its place, the Government will be taking forward this issue as part of the Charter Review process, since what the BBC does and its future role is fundamentally influenced by how it is funded. We firmly believe that the unique obligations placed on the BBC demand continued, sustainable public funding to support its vital work. We will work closely with the BBC, and engage with other broadcasters, stakeholders across the creative industries as well as the British public to inform our thinking. This will include the opportunity for stakeholders and audiences across the country to respond to the Charter Review public consultation before the new charter comes into effect in 2028.

The Charter Review will be about ensuring the BBC thrives well into the future and can command the support of the people who pay for it. To achieve this aim, we must ensure the BBC is properly and fairly supported. The Government is determined to get the Charter Review right and future proof the BBC, but we can only deliver this if the BBC is on a stable financial footing for the remainder of this Charter Period. We will always take decisions on funding to provide certainty and stability to the BBC, reflecting our understanding of the pressures it faces, and ensuring those decisions deliver the best outcomes for Licence Fee payers.

To provide stability to the BBC and S4C over the remainder of this Charter Period, the licence fee will increase in line with CPI inflation, as required by the Licence Fee Settlement agreed by the last Government, in 2022. This means a £5 increase per household to £174.50 from April 2025, less than the £10.50 increase in the previous year. Based on our assumptions on future TV licence uptake, this increase will provide around £75 million more in licence fee income to support the BBC and S4C in delivering their essential public service remits, allowing them to continue to deliver world-class, educational and engaging programming.

This increase represents a return to the approach taken at the start of this Charter Period, using the average of CPI from the previous October to September. To provide certainty to the BBC, S4C and the public, the Government confirms that it intends to use this same approach for calculating uplifts in the remaining years of this Charter Period. We will introduce legislation to implement the April 2025 uplift when Parliamentary time allows.

We have already set out concerns about the impact of TV Licensing enforcement action on vulnerable households. While the Government strongly believes in public funding for the BBC given the public good it serves, we are aware of the financial difficulties faced by

some households, and committed to supporting them to spread the cost of the TV licence. For this reason the Government is also announcing today a significant extension to the Simple Payment Plan.

For the BBC to be a truly national broadcaster, the BBC must be available even to those struggling. The Simple Payment Plan is an existing scheme that helps households struggling to pay for their licence fee throughout the year. However, it is currently available to a limited number of households. We will introduce legislation, when Parliamentary time allows, that BBC analysis suggests could double the number of households in financial hardship benefitting from the scheme to around 500,000 by the end of the Charter Period to support them to be able to access all the BBC offers. This forms part of a wider discussion I am having with the BBC and Ministry of Justice on how we can collectively reduce the impact of TV Licensing enforcement action on women and vulnerable people.

## DEFENCE

### ■ Continuation of existing Contingent Liability in support of Ukraine

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Luke Pollard):**

[\[HCWS268\]](#)

I wish to inform the House that I am today laying a Departmental Minute to advise of an extension to an existing contingent liability associated with the provision of support to the Armed Force of Ukraine.

Since the start of the Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, the UK has been at the forefront of international support to Ukraine, providing essential military capability to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. We have developed capabilities, working with UK industry, to increase the support to the Armed Forces of Ukraine to defend against the threat from Russia.

The Departmental Minute describes the contingent liability that the MOD will hold, which will provide an indemnity for any sums (including any legal or other associated costs) that UK Defence industry might be liable to pay in relation to legal action brought against them by a third party in respect of liabilities arising from any damage to property, injury or loss of life from any unforeseen malfunction of a system operated by the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The MOD and other stakeholders are taking all reasonable measures to mitigate the risk of injury and or damage and Defence Legal Advisors assesses the likelihood to any risk arising as Low. The maximum contingent liability held against the MOD is unquantifiable and will remain for the full service life of the system.

It is usual to allow a period of 14 Sitting Days prior to accepting a contingent liability, to provide Members of Parliament an opportunity to raise any objections.

This notification confirms the intention to extend a contingent liability that was initially agreed in July, during the pre-election period when Parliament had been dissolved and

the normal process for notification of reportable contingent liabilities could not be followed. Further details are provided in the Departmental Minute.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### ■ Publication of the HIV Action Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2024 Report

**Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention (Andrew Gwynne):** [\[HCWS270\]](#)

This government is committed to ending new HIV transmissions within England by 2030. On 28 November, the Prime Minister made a significant downpayment on this as he announced that emergency department opt-out testing for HIV will be extended to both extremely high and high prevalence areas during 25/26, backed by £27million of funding from DHSC budgets, further confirming our determination.

I am pleased to update the House on the publication of the third HIV Action Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2024 Report. This report provides an annual overview to Parliament of the government's progress towards no new HIV transmissions within England by 2030, as committed to in the 2021 HIV Action Plan.

We are making progress towards our shared goals, and we should be encouraged by some of the highlights from the report.

- HIV testing in sexual health services increased by 8% from 2022 showing greater rises in some key population groups, such as gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (GBMSM) where a 36% increase can be observed. This is coupled by a substantial progress to reduce new HIV diagnoses first made in England between 2019 and 2023, particularly among the same population group
- Overall, new HIV diagnoses first made in England fell by 12% from 2,801 in 2019 to 2,451 in 2022. However, this figure rose by 15% to 2,810 in 2023.
- The blood borne virus (BBV) opt-out testing in emergency department Programme has been a great success and has helped us identify a significant proportion of new HIV diagnoses in 2023.
- England continues to be one of the few countries in the world officially meeting the 95-95-95 targets when using the global measurement methods. However, in response to stakeholders' suggestions, UKHSA adjusted the UNAIDS 95 95 95 targets, for the first time, so that they also account for people diagnosed but not in active HIV care and people for whom information on viral suppression was not reported. This new approach shows UNAIDS 90-90-90 goals were met in England in 2023 and partially met for the UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals, with 96% of all those living with HIV being diagnosed; 94% of those diagnosed receiving treatment, and 92% of those treated being virally suppressed and thus unable to pass on the virus.
- Due to success in HIV treatment, over half of people living with HIV are over the age of 50.

However, there is more work to be done to achieve our shared ambitions.

- Inequalities are widening in access to HIV prevention interventions, treatment and ongoing care, quality of life and stigma across most demographic characteristics, in particular, age, ethnicity, gender identity and exposure. For example, among men exposed through sex with men, HIV diagnoses fell by 35% amongst white men between 2019 and 2023, whilst in men from ethnic minority backgrounds, there was an increase of diagnoses from 26% in 2019 to 33% in 2023
- Similarly, there has been a significant increase in identifying need for and initiation of HIV Pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP): highest in white GBMSM and lowest in people from ethnic minority groups such as black African and black Caribbean.

As we reach the later stages in ending transmission, it is likely identifying everyone living with the virus and narrowing inequalities will become more challenging. Our approach relies therefore on concerted efforts across the whole system.

DHSC, the UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA), NHS England and a broad range of system partners in consultation with people living with HIV, their friends and families and the voluntary and community sector, are considering evidence from this report and working together to develop a new HIV Action Plan that will address these challenges. We aim to publish the Plan in summer 2025.

I will keep Parliament updated on our progress and trust you will continue to support our shared goal of becoming the first country in the world to end HIV transmission.