



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 3 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:37 P.M., 03 December 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

Questions marked thus **[R]** indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.
 Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

ANSWERS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Foreign Investment: Dispute Resolution

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will initiative a review of UK treaties containing Investor-State Dispute Settlements.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK is party to 83 Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) that contain investment protection and Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). In 2022, these BITs covered at least £195 billion of UK investment overseas.

ISDS provides an independent means to resolve disputes with states where investors believe they have experienced arbitrary, discriminatory or unfair treatment or expropriation without adequate compensation.

The Government has no plans to review UK treaties containing ISDS.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will initiative a review of UK treaties containing Investor-State Dispute Settlements.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The UK is party to 83 Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) that contain investment protection and Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). In 2022, these BITs covered at least £195 billion of UK investment overseas.

ISDS provides an independent means to resolve disputes with states where investors believe they have experienced arbitrary, discriminatory or unfair treatment or expropriation without adequate compensation.

The Government has no plans to review UK treaties containing ISDS.

■ Hospitality Industry: Rural Areas

Samantha Niblett: [\[16303\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what plans he has to support (a) pubs and (b) the wider hospitality industry in (i) rural areas and (ii) South Derbyshire constituency.

Gareth Thomas:

Pubs and hospitality businesses, including those in rural areas and South Derbyshire, are at the heart of our communities and are vital for economic growth. That is why the Government is creating a fairer business rate system by introducing permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses from 2026-27 and extending the current relief for 1 year at 40%.

The government is also reducing alcohol duty on qualifying draught products, representing an overall reduction in duty bills of over £85m a year.

We will also transform the apprenticeship levy into a more flexible growth and skills levy to support business, including in the hospitality industry and boost opportunity.

Through the Hospitality Sector Council, we are addressing strategic issues for the sector related to high street regeneration, skills, sustainability, and productivity.

■ Paternity Pay

Victoria Collins:

[\[16618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many people claimed statutory paternity pay in each of the last five years.

Justin Madders:

Information provided by employers to HMRC show the number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP). This data provides a broad indication of Paternity Leave take-up but does not include those that take unpaid paternity leave. The Parental Rights Survey found that 70% of all employee fathers took Paternity Leave.

Table 1: Individuals in receipt of SPP, 2019/20 to 2023/24 (the latest year for which full year data is available)

YEAR (APRIL TO MARCH)	TOTAL
2019-20	208,000
2020-21	176,400
2021-22	204,200
2022-23	195,300
2023-24	207,600

1. Data is collected using HMRC Real Time Information (RTI) and is subject to revision.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Figures are based on the total number of individuals in a given year, irrespective of when the payment first started. Some individuals will be counted across two years.

■ Post Offices: Grimsby

Melanie Onn:

[\[15224\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department has had discussions with the Post Office on the potential closure of the post office in Victoria

Street, Grimsby; and if he will take steps to prohibit the closure of this and other high-street branches.

Gareth Thomas:

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade has had no discussion with Post Office Limited on the potential closure of the post office in Victoria Street, Grimsby. However the Secretary of State and I have met with the Post Office Chair, Nigel Railton, to discuss his proposals for the future of the company. No decision to close any or all of the remaining DMBs have been taken. Post Office are in dialogue with the Unions and postmaster representative bodies about future options for the DMBs.

Although Post Office has the freedom to make commercial decisions regarding the composition of its network, Government sets the parameters for the Post Office to operate in. Government protects the branch network by setting minimum access criteria which require 99% of the UK population to be within three miles of their nearest Post Office outlet. The access criteria ensure that however the network changes, services remain within local reach of all citizens.

■ **Small Businesses: Recruitment**

Lewis Cocking:

[\[15845\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to support small businesses to recruit new employees.

Gareth Thomas:

Our forthcoming Small Business Strategy will reaffirm our long-term support for small businesses and outline our vision for boosting scale-ups and helping all types of business to thrive and grow. This strategy will empower business owners and entrepreneurs to innovate, export, and create jobs across their regions.

In addition, as confirmed in the autumn Budget the Government has taken steps to protect small businesses by increasing the Employment Allowance to £10,500. This measure will help small businesses in particular - in 2024 small businesses (with 0-49 employees) make up 99.2% of the total business population.

■ **Typhoon Aircraft: Exports**

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[\[15904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department plans to take steps to help firms secure orders of Eurofighter Typhoon jets from international partners.

Gareth Thomas:

Exports of the Eurofighter Typhoon jets are led by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). My Department does however support MOD-led export campaigns through our network of staff in the UK and overseas. We also work closely with the Typhoon partner governments of Germany, Italy and Spain, in line with the commitments each nation has made to support the others' exports.

Earlier this month, the Defence Secretary was in Turkey and Saudi Arabia to discuss with Defence Ministers the future role that UK-made Typhoons could play in both countries.

■ **Vauxhall Motors: Luton**

Chris Hinchliff:

[\[16580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether his Department has had discussions with trade unions on Vauxhall's planned closure of its plant in Luton.

Sarah Jones:

Stellantis announced on 26 November that it was starting a consultation with staff on its plans to consolidate its two UK manufacturing sites into one plant at Ellesmere Port.

The Department is actively engaging with the company and has asked them to share the full details of its plans, including its consultation with workers and trade unions.

We will continue to work closely with Stellantis, as well as trade unions and Luton Borough Council, on the next steps of their proposals.

CABINET OFFICE

■ **10 Downing Street: Official Hospitality**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16516\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024 to Question 5574 on Lord Alli, whether any political receptions held in Downing Street have been billed through the Cabinet Office and recharged to the governing party since 5 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Rt Hon Member to my answer of 09 October 2024, Official Report, PQ 5574.

■ **Community Development: Finance**

Ian Roome:

[R] [\[15889\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what reason funding for community resilience is not a statutory duty with accompanying funding in England and Wales.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Civil Contingencies Act and accompanying non-legislative measures deliver a single framework for civil protection in the UK.

The Government has a legal obligation to review the Act every five years. The most recent Review was published in March 2022 and concluded that the Act continues to achieve its stated objectives but also set out recommendations to strengthen the

system. The review found no evidence to recommend a statutory duty for community resilience.

Several of the mandatory requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act already support community resilience building, including the publication of risk and emergency management information, warning and informing the public about emergencies, and providing business continuity advice for private and voluntary organisations. The National Resilience Standards and the Community Resilience Development Framework set out good practice for Local Resilience Forums to build community resilience.

However, in light of the recent Inquires including COVID and Grenfell, it is right that we seek to continue to improve resilience across the whole of the UK to ensure it meets the needs of the evolving risk landscape. Through the resilience review announced by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in July, we are considering a range of options for how we can help Local Resilience Forums build resilience throughout their communities.

■ **Ethics and Integrity Commission**

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[15852\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what his planned timetable is for establishing the Ethics and Integrity Commission.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Hon Member to the answer of 31 July 2024, Official Report, PQ 1251.

■ **Ministers: Corporate Hospitality and Official Gifts**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[16515\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how long after the end of the relevant month ministerial (a) gift and (b) hospitality data will be published.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government will publish, monthly, a register of ministers' gifts and hospitality. Work on the new register is progressing and further details will be published in due course.

■ **Ministers: Official Gifts**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[16345\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he plans to start monthly reporting of ministerial (a) gifts and (b) hospitality.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Work on the new register is progressing and further details will be published in due course.

■ Senior Civil Servants and Special Advisers: Disclosure of Information

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16346\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will make it his policy that (a) senior official and (b) special adviser transparency returns are published as frequently as those of Ministers.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16348\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 18 October 2024 to Question 8436 on Government Departments: Disclosure of Information, if he will make it his policy that all transparency publications currently published quarterly will be published monthly.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Government publishes a wide range of transparency data. Reporting requirements remain in place, with data regularly being published on GOV.UK. The Cabinet Office will publish, monthly, a Register of Ministers' Gifts and Hospitality in due course.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Charities: Employers' Contributions

Shivani Raja:

[\[15857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to employer National Insurance contributions on not-for-profit organisations.

Stephanie Peacock:

At the recent Budget, the government took a number of difficult but necessary decisions on tax, welfare, and spending to fix the foundations of the public finances, fund public services, and restore economic stability.

DCMS Ministers have met with representatives from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to discuss this issue and are aware of their concerns about the impacts of the increase to employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs). The government recognises the need to protect the smallest businesses and charities, which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500. This means that more than half of businesses (including charities) with NICs liabilities will either gain or see no change next year.

We are also expanding eligibility of the Employment Allowance by removing the £100,000 eligibility threshold, to simplify and reform employer NICs so that all eligible employers now benefit. Businesses and charities will still be able to claim employer NICs reliefs including those for under 21s and under 25 apprentices, where eligible.

Within the tax system, we provide support to charities through a range of reliefs and exemptions, including reliefs for charitable giving. More than £6 billion in charitable

reliefs was provided to charities, Community Amateur Sports Clubs and their donors in 2023 to 2024. The biggest individual reliefs provided are Gift Aid at £1.6 billion and business rates relief at nearly £2.4 billion.

■ Civil Society: Energy

Tom Hayes: [\[16074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much funding he plans to provide to the voluntary, community, and social enterprise energy efficiency scheme in 2025.

Tom Hayes: [\[16075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional funding to the voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations for (a) reducing their energy consumption and (b) other costs.

Stephanie Peacock:

The VCSE Energy Efficiency Scheme (EES) is a £25.53 million grant programme, set up under the previous government and delivered in 2023/24 and 2024/25 to increase the energy efficiency and long-term sustainability of frontline VCSE organisations.

There is no plan to continue the EES beyond this financial year. However there are a number of other ways in which the government supports VCSEs with their financial sustainability. This includes delivering other grant programmes, growing other sources of funding such as the social investment market, and supporting the viability of central and local government contracts. The government will also shortly set out how it intends to allocate the £350 million expected to flow into the Dormant Assets Scheme in England between 2024 and 2028 to the named causes - youth, financial inclusion, social investment, and community wealth funds.

■ Leisure Centres: Finance

Mike Amesbury: [\[15818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what (a) capital and (b) revenue funding her Department provides for local authority leisure centres.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government encourages local leaders to prioritise access to sport and physical activity wherever possible. Local Authorities are responsible for decisions regarding sport and leisure provision in their area. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport does not provide capital or revenue funding for local authority leisure centres.

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

■ Television Licences: Non-payment

Tom Hayes: [\[16062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of penalties for television licence evasion.

Stephanie Peacock:

The BBC is responsible for collection and enforcement of the TV licence, including deciding whether to bring prosecution action.

The Secretary of State believes it is important that the television licence fee has a fair enforcement regime that does not disproportionately impact vulnerable people, and has discussed her concerns on this issue with the BBC's leadership.

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

■ Youth Work

David Williams: [\[15859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to encourage more people to (a) enter the youth sector workforce and (b) become youth workers.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government fully recognises the importance of youth services to help young people live safe and healthy lives, and the vital role that youth workers play in delivering those services and building trusted relationships.

This government has committed to co-producing a new National Youth Strategy, which is an opportunity to look afresh at the training, recruitment and retention of youth workers. As part of the Strategy, we will be consulting closely with young people and the youth sector over the coming months to fully understand their needs and the issues they consider to be most crucial in addressing.

The Strategy will be published next year.

DEFENCE

■ Ammunition: Israel

Brian Leishman: [\[16080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many applications for exemption to overfly the UK with war munitions with a final destination of Israel have been (a) received, (b) approved and (c) rejected since 7 October 2023.

Luke Pollard:

For operational security reasons and as a matter of policy, the Ministry of Defence will neither confirm, deny, nor comment on any foreign nations' military aircraft movement or operations within UK airspace or UK overseas bases.

■ Armed Conflict: Civilians**Brendan O'Hara:**[\[16763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to respond to the recommendations of the report entitled Strengthening UK Military Investigations into Civilian Harm, published by the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights on 26 November 2024.

Luke Pollard:

I thank the hon. Member for raising this report with the Department.

Where the UK undertakes military action, it is conducted in full accordance with UK and international law.

Military action is meticulously planned in accordance with the recognised IHL principles of proportionality, military necessity, distinction and humanity, as well as in line with relevant policies such as the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict; Joint Service Publication 985 – Human Security in Defence. Great care is taken to minimise the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure, and this sits at the core of our approach.

Working level discussions are ongoing between Ministry of Defence officials, our allies, and civil society organisations to share and promote best practice on civilian harm mitigation.

Brendan O'Hara:[\[16764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with the Dutch Ministry of Defence on civilian harm mitigation and response.

Luke Pollard:

Working level discussions have taken place between officials from the Ministry of Defence and Dutch Ministry of Defence on civilian harm mitigation and response. This has also included officials from the US Department of Defence as well as officials from Defence Ministries of other allies. The aim of these discussions is to advance engagement between allies on sharing and promoting best practice on civilian harm mitigation within respective Armed Forces.

■ Armed Forces: Cadets**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[16717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an estimate of the projected number of army cadets for each year of the remainder of this Parliament.

AI Carns:

There are currently c. 75,000 cadets and c. 11,000 cadet force adult volunteers involved in the Army Cadets.

Work is currently underway to understand opportunities for expansion across Ministry of Defence Cadets. Although it is too early to make an accurate assessment on projected numbers, the work aims to reflect the important contribution cadets make to society.

Research has for example shown that participation in Cadets increases social mobility and improves the health and wellbeing of young people, producing an annual return on investment in the region of £95 million. We are committed to sustaining the Cadet Forces across the UK.

■ Global Combat Air Programme**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[15292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what progress his Department has made on the procurement for the Royal Air Force's future fast-jet trainer for the Global Combat Air Programme.

Maria Eagle:

The Royal Air Force is undertaking a capability investigation into the replacement of the current advanced jet trainer capability and combat aircrew training requirements for Typhoon, F-35 Lightning and the future Global Combat Air Programme, which is informing the Strategic Defence Review (SDR).

The nature of UK combat aircraft operation continues to transform, and future training requirements reflect this. Therefore, the capability investigation includes consideration of a training system that would combine live flying training, including with our air weapons range infrastructure, and networked virtual training through realistic simulation. This will ensure that we can continue to deliver a world class training capability. However, no decisions will be taken until after the SDR is completed.

■ Military Aircraft: Helicopters**James Cartlidge:**[\[15458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate he has made of the cost of the commercial service to bridge the availability gap for rotary capability in (a) Brunei and (b) Cyprus.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence signed a £122 million contract in 2024 to purchase six H-145 aircraft. These aircraft will replace the aging Puma aircraft to fulfil key capabilities in Cyprus and Brunei. A range of options are being explored to fill the capability gaps in the interim period before the arrival of H-145.

■ Unmanned Air Vehicles**Mr Gregory Campbell:** [\[16708\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what information his Department holds on the reasons for recent drone activity near (a) RAF Lakenheath, (b) RAF Mildenhall and (c) RAF Feltwell.

Luke Pollard:

We take these matters seriously and the Ministry of Defence is working in partnership with our allies and the appropriate civilian authorities as they investigate this matter.

The use of uncrewed aerial systems around protected areas in the UK causes a risk to life and is illegal. We will work with civil authorities to prosecute those responsible.

■ Veterans**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[16769\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 15241, if he will make an estimate of the number of veterans who are (a) eligible for Pension Credit and (b) have an income of less than £12,500 a year.

Al Carns:

The information is not held in the format requested. We currently do not have the data to allow us to make such estimates.

■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure**Sir John Hayes:** [\[15724\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will take steps to create a memorial in central London to nuclear test veterans.

Al Carns:

A memorial commemorating all personnel of the Combined Services Task Force, who served during the UK's nuclear tests, is located at the National Memorial Arboretum, which is the focal point for commemorating all those who have served in the UK Armed Forces. We are also aware of a number of other local Nuclear Test Memorials across the UK.

The Ministry of Defence has no current plans for further memorials to nuclear test veterans. Memorials are typically financed by public subscription and are located with the permission of the relevant local authority.

■ Veterans: South Derbyshire**Samantha Niblett:** [\[16302\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he plans to take to help support veterans with (a) housing and (b) education and skills training in South Derbyshire constituency.

AI Carns:

This is a Government of service that will always stand up for those who serve our country, no matter which community they are based in. I am working across Government and with civil society to ensure veterans, including those throughout Derbyshire get access to housing, employment and other support they need.

Op FORTITUDE is a single referral pathway available across the United Kingdom that provides housing guidance and assistance to veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness and as of 24 November 2024, over 2,850 referrals have been made and nearly 816 veterans have been supported into housing.

The Prime Minister recently announced the continuation of funding for the cross-UK Reducing Veterans Homelessness Programme and Op FORTITUDE, ensuring that support will be there into 2026 for veterans at risk of homelessness. This is in addition to his commitment earlier in the year that veterans will be exempt from local connection and residency tests when applying for social housing in England.

There are a range of skills and education support available to veterans, including via the Career Transition Partnership, which supports those in search of new job and education opportunities.

Additional support is also available to veterans and their families via a Sector-Based Employment Pathway, which offers employment and career progression support, including access to qualifications and training, at any stage in their lives after leaving Service.

EDUCATION**■ Academies: Finance****James McMurdock:****[16030]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department is providing support for academy schools facing financial difficulties.

Catherine McKinnell:

The primary responsibility for the financial oversight of academy trusts rests with the trustees themselves, supported by the financial management and governance requirements set by the department in 'Academy and free school funding agreements', which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academy-and-free-school-funding-agreements>, the 'Academy trust handbook 2024', which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academy-trust-handbook/academy-trust-handbook-2024-to-print>, and 'Academies Accounts Direction', available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-accounts-direction>.

Academy trusts are delivering a high standard of financial management and governance, and the latest published data shows that 98.2% of trusts had a cumulative surplus or a zero balance.

The department supports all schools to manage their resources effectively by providing high-quality advice, support and development to help them protect against financial difficulty. Where academy trusts are experiencing significant financial difficulty, we are clear that our starting approach will always be to have a supportive conversation to explore the challenges trusts are facing and suggest the practical ways we may be able to support them.

The department can also provide additional financial support to academy trusts where required. This support might be a short-term advance to enable the trust to manage cash flow effectively over a period up to 12 months, or longer term support that aims to both prevent financial failure in the short-term and secure the trust's long term sustainability. Additional financial support may be subject to conditions, but we are clear that our focus is on considering how we can support academy trusts. The guidance 'Financial support for academy trusts in financial difficulty' is available on GOV.UK and can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-support-for-academy-trusts-in-financial-difficulty/financial-support-for-academy-trusts-in-financial-difficulty>. It sets out the types of support the department may provide, the eligibility criteria and potential conditions of financial support.

■ Academies: South Basildon and East Thurrock

James McMurdock: [\[16028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will meet with the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock to discuss academy schools in that constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

As the Minister responsible for academies, I will happily consider a meeting with the hon. member for South Basildon and East Thurrock. In addition, the Regional Director for the East of England offers regular meetings with Members of Parliament to discuss matters of interest. He has been asked to contact you to discuss academy schools in your constituency.

Regional Directors work locally across children's social care, special educational needs and disabilities, schools and area-based programmes to improve outcomes for children, families and learners. They offer support and intervene where necessary to deliver rapid improvement.

James McMurdock: [\[16033\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with (a) Mossbourne Federation and (b) Ortu Federation on academy schools in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

Departmental officials have held regular meetings with both the Mossbourne Federation and the Ortu Federation. Discussions have focused on ensuring the successful transfer of the three Ortu Federation academies to the Mossbourne

Federation. We are confident that the Mossbourne Federation is well placed to provide the support these schools need.

The transfer is scheduled to take place on 1 January 2025.

■ Academies: Special Educational Needs

James McMurdock:

[16424]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure budget constraints in academy schools do not disproportionately affect provisions for students with special educational needs.

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.

All schools are responsible for ensuring that they make the best use of their budgets to support all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs. The overall Core Schools Budget is rising by £2.3 billion to £63.9 billion in the 2025/26 financial year. Within that, the department is providing an increase of almost £1 billion for local authorities' high needs budgets, bringing total high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND to £11.9 billion. Local authorities use their high needs budgets to support SEND provision for pupils in both mainstream and special schools, whether they are schools maintained by a local authority or academies.

■ Academies: Standards

James McMurdock:

[16421]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department takes to ensure adequate financial oversight of academy trusts; and how often financial audits are conducted of underperforming trusts.

James McMurdock:

[16428]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has plans to review the adequacy of transparency requirements for academy trusts, including (a) financial reporting and (b) decision-making processes.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government is clear that strong accountability is non-negotiable. That is why it has committed to bring multi-academy trusts into the inspection system, to ensure every part of our school system is driving forward the best outcomes for children.

The primary responsibility for the financial oversight of academy trusts rests with the trustees themselves, supported by the financial management and governance requirements and framework set by the department in academy trusts' Funding Agreements, which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academy-and-free-school-funding-agreements>.

Further guidance is provided by the academy trust handbook accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academy-trust-handbook/academy-trust-handbook-2024-to-print>, and the Academies Accounts Direction, found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-accounts-direction>.

This framework states that all academy trusts must have an annual external audit of their annual accounts by a registered statutory auditor. This external scrutiny provides the department with a high level of confidence that oversight is professional and consistent, as the external auditors must comply with auditing standards set by an independent regulator.

Auditors must also give an opinion on whether the accounts are true and fair and provide an opinion to the department on regularity and compliance by the trust, reporting any transactions they have identified which have breached our requirements. Additionally, auditors prepare management letters, describing any weaknesses in the trust and recommendations for improvement. The department require trusts to respond to audit findings in an appropriate and timely manner.

The framework also outlines that all academy trusts must:

- Implement robust financial procedures including internal checks of the suitability of, and compliance with, their financial systems.
- Have an audit committee to manage their risks and oversee the checks of systems of control. This committee must ensure an appropriate approach to scrutiny, such as the appointment of internal auditors, report on this work in their annual accounts and take ownership of balancing their budget and send a copy to the department in advance of each year.
- Publish their annual audited accounts and details of their objectives, achievements and future plans and set out what they have done to promote value for money in support of those objectives as part of their annual report and accounts.

Where concerns are identified, the department will intervene in a way that is proportionate to the risk and preserves education provision. This can include issuing a trust with a Notice to Improve (Nti) or, in the most serious cases, termination of the Funding Agreement. Where academy trusts are experiencing significant financial difficulty, the department is clear that its starting approach will always be to have a supportive conversation to explore the challenges trusts are facing and suggest the practical ways it may be able to support.

The department will consider the financial, educational and governance aspects of the trust and work through budget returns with trusts, including discussing revisions to the forecasts as necessary based on recent pressures.

Academy trusts are delivering a high standard of financial management and governance. The latest published data shows that 98.2% of trusts had a cumulative surplus or a zero balance, 99.8% of academy trust accounts received unqualified opinions. In addition, independent auditors concluded that there were no regularity

exceptions in trust accounts for over 92% of trusts, and less than 1% of academy trusts are subject to an active Ntl.

James McMurdock:

[\[16433\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what early intervention measures are in place to identify (a) financial mismanagement and (b) declining performance in academy schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

Ofsted routinely inspects academies and must notify my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education when an academy is causing concern. Where an academy is causing concern, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has powers to intervene which can result in it being transferred to a different academy trust where necessary.

In addition, the department monitors the financial performance of academy trusts and if it identifies concerns, will intervene in a way that is proportionate to the risk and preserves education provision. This can include issuing a trust with a Notice to Improve setting out the remedial action it must take and, in the most serious cases, terminating funding agreements so that the trust's academies can be transferred to alternative trusts.

The government is committed to bring multi-academy trusts into scope for inspection which will enhance the department's ability to act where a trust which is responsible for a number of academies is not managing them effectively.

■ **Adult Education: Finance**

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[15962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to paragraph 3.46 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, how much of the additional funding for further education will be spent on adult learning.

Janet Daby:

This government is committed to driving economic growth and supporting opportunity for all, and further education (FE) is central to this. The government is providing an additional £300 million for FE to support development of the skills our economy needs, and a further £300 million to support colleges to maintain, improve and ensure suitability of their estate. The department will set out how the additional funding will be distributed in due course.

■ **Apprentices**

James Asser:

[\[16022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase the availability of apprenticeships in (a) England, (b) London and (c) West Ham and Beckton constituency.

Janet Daby:

The department's reformed growth and skills offer, which will have apprenticeships at its core, will deliver greater flexibility for learners and employers, including through shorter duration apprenticeships in targeted sectors, helping more people learn new high-quality skills at work, and fuelling innovation in businesses across the UK. Our reformed offer will be realigned with our industrial strategy, creating routes into good, skilled jobs in growing industries, including construction, digital and technology and clean energy industries.

The department is supporting industry to use existing skills flexibilities to deliver apprenticeship training, including through the work of the National Housebuilding Council and Construction Industry Training Board in their creation of housebuilding training hubs to make 5,000 more construction industry apprenticeship places available per year.

The department has also begun work to develop new foundation apprenticeships, a training offer that will give more young people a foot in the door and supporting clear pathways and progression in work-based training and employment.

The department is also continuing outreach work in schools and colleges through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme and targeting young people through the Skills for Life campaign.

Mr Richard Holden:[\[16518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding her Department plans to provide for level seven apprenticeships in each of the next three financial years; and on what categories of apprenticeship this funding will be spent.

Janet Daby:

Spending on apprenticeships, including the categories of apprenticeship, is demand led as apprenticeships are a job with training and therefore employers and their needs determine which opportunities are available to learners.

The government will be asking more employers to step forward and fund level 7 apprenticeships themselves, outside of the levy-funded growth and skills offer. This will enable better targeting of funding and help more people to get on at the start of their working lives instead of subsidising qualifications for those already established in their careers. The department will set out more detail in the new year.

■ Bus Services: Training**Alex Mayer:**[\[15881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to allow local leaders to use Skills Bootcamp funding to support training for coach drivers.

Janet Daby:

Skills Bootcamps are an important offer in the skills landscape, and the department continues to support the delivery of Skills Bootcamps through funding Mayoral

Combined Authorities (MCAs) and local areas directly. We continue to keep the sectors eligible for Skills Bootcamps funding under review.

MCAs and the Greater London Authority have the flexibility to use up to 50% of their grants to test Skills Bootcamps in additional sectors. As of the 2024/25 financial year, two trailblazer areas, the West Midlands Combined Authority and Greater Manchester Combined Authority can use 100% of their grants to this effect.

■ Children: Poverty

Uma Kumaran:

[\[16004\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will ensure that the requirements of children in migrant households are included in the child poverty strategy.

Catherine McKinnell:

In developing a child poverty strategy, the child poverty taskforce is considering all children across the United Kingdom. The taskforce recognises the distinct challenges faced by migrant children. The causes of child poverty are deep-rooted, with solutions both for and which go beyond government, and the taskforce is exploring all available levers in response.

To develop the strategy, the taskforce has committed to engaging extensively with families, charities, campaigners and leading organisations across the UK to shape and inform our plans. We are engaging with organisations who have made representations on behalf of migrant children and will continue to do so as our plans develop.

■ Curriculum

James Asser:

[\[16023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking with (a) employers and (b) further education providers to help ensure the post-16 curriculum is aligned with the future needs of the UK workforce.

Janet Daby:

The department is developing a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education and skills, to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce, and drive economic growth through our Industrial Strategy.

My noble Friend, the Minister for Skills' keynote speech on 12 November at the Association of Colleges conference recommitted to this pledge, and to working collaboratively with the sector to bring forward this strategy, building on the Curriculum and Assessment Review, the introduction of Skills England, and with a continued focus on lifelong learning.

This will launch an opportunity for further and higher education sectors, local government, learners, and employers to shape the government's long-term strategy for skills, as well as work across government to ensure the department leverages skills in driving progress against all government missions.

Skills England is being established to build a high-skill, high-productivity workforce that is matched to employers' needs. It will unify the skills landscape by bringing together large and small businesses with training providers, regional actors, national government, unions and other key partners. It will identify priority skills gaps, help ensure the growth and skills offer delivers value for money, meets the needs of business and ensure that the workforce is equipped with the skills needed to power economic growth.

Skills England will provide authoritative assessments of national and regional skills needs now and for the future, combining the best available statistical data with insights generated from employers and other key stakeholders.

This deep understanding of skills needs will provide a solid platform on which central government, Skills England, employers, providers, unions and regional organisations can come together to make effective decisions on where to focus to close skills gaps and mismatches. It will work closely with the Industrial Strategy Council to ensure that training schemes drive growth in the national economy.

Its work will include ensuring that there is a comprehensive suite of apprenticeships, training and technical qualifications available that are aligned with what employers need. It will also play a crucial role in identifying which training should be eligible for the Growth and Skills offer and will work closely with employers to ensure that occupational standards meet their needs.

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) also give employers a more strategic role in the skills system and support the department's long-term priority to drive local economic growth. Across all areas of England, LSIPs have helped engage thousands of local businesses and have brought them together with local providers and stakeholders to collaboratively agree and deliver actions to better align provision of post-16 technical education and training with local labour market needs.

■ Department for Education: Consultants

Dan Carden:

[15520]

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

Janet Daby:

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.

The latest available data that has been audited and published as part of the Group Annual Report and Accounts, is linked below:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-education-consolidated-annual-report-and-accounts-2021-to-2022>

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-education-consolidated-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-to-2023>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-education-consolidated-annual-report-and-accounts-2023-to-2024>

The data for post-March 2024 is live and unaudited. Additionally, due to the department's accruals accounting, the partial year's data may be incomplete and misleading. Therefore, we are unable to provide data beyond March 2024.

■ Educational Institutions: Cybersecurity

Jim Shannon:

[16147]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help ensure cyber security and resilience in (a) schools, (b) academies and (c) other educational establishments.

Stephen Morgan:

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

Whilst education institutions are responsible for their own IT, the department supports schools, colleges and other education institutions to enhance their cyber resilience through various initiatives.

The department has published a set of 11 core digital and technology standards. These can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-digital-and-technology-standards-in-schools-and-colleges/cyber-security-standards-for-schools-and-colleges>. Developed by technical and educational experts, these standards provide guidance on the essential technology and infrastructure required to meet both business and teaching needs. The standards cover key areas, including connectivity, cyber security, filtering and monitoring, cloud services, servers and storage, digital accessibility, leadership and governance and devices.

Adhering to these cyber security standards helps schools and colleges mitigate the risk of cyber-attacks and minimise disruption in the event of a cyber incident. Additionally, compliance ensures sensitive data is securely protected and critical data is backed up effectively.

The department has a dedicated sector cyber security team that provides appropriate advice and guidance to help schools and colleges meet these standards and maintain robust cyber security practices.

Further support is available through the department's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA), which has included cyber incident cover as a standard benefit since the 2022/23 membership year. RPA members have access to a 24/7 Incident Response Service in the event of a cyber incident, with 56% of schools in England currently participating in the RPA.

The department also collaborates with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), Jisc and other organisations to further support educational institutions. This includes

providing access to the NCSC's Protective DNS (PDNS) service, part of its Active Cyber Defence suite, which offers ongoing protection against malware and other network-based threats for schools, colleges and universities.

Further guidance on cyber security for schools can be found here:
<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/education-skills/cyber-security-schools>.

■ Extended Services

Vikki Slade: **[16048]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to introduce wraparound childcare in all schools by September 2026.

Stephen Morgan:

This government will build a modern childcare system that supports families from the end of parental leave, right through to the end of primary school.

Childcare needs do not stop when children start school. To support parents the government will deliver free, universal breakfast clubs in every primary school in England. Free breakfast clubs will be available in up to 750 early adopter schools from April 2025 as part of a 'test and learn' phase in advance of a national roll out.

The government is additionally delivering the national wraparound childcare programme which has provided local authorities with more than £160 million to deliver the expansion of new before and after school places for primary school-aged children. The government's ambition is that, by 2026, all parents and carers of primary school-aged children who need it will be able to access term-time childcare in their local area from 8am to 6pm.

The programme is designed to support local authorities to deliver their statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient wraparound childcare places and remove the additional challenges faced in local areas with shortages. Where local wraparound provision is not available, parents can request that the school their child attends considers establishing wraparound or holiday childcare through the long-standing 'right to request' process .

■ Further Education: STEM Subjects

James Asser: **[16024]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking encourage the take-up of STEM subjects at further education level.

Janet Daby:

The department continues to support the take-up of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in further education (FE). Skills, including STEM skills, are crucial for the delivery of the government's missions. That is why the department is building a coherent, flexible, high-quality skills system to break down barriers to opportunity and drive economic growth, underpinned by a new post-16 skills and education strategy.

The department is setting up Skills England to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to help meet the skills needs of the next decade. Aligned to the government's industrial strategy, this work will also be underpinned by Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) which help make technical education and training more responsive to local labour market and employer needs.

The department will continue to support learners who wish to have a career in STEM through its technical education offer, with a range of high-quality qualifications and apprenticeship opportunities at all levels. Examples of this include:

- 12 T Levels in STEM subjects, including engineering, science, digital and media.
- Over 370 employer-designed apprenticeship standards in STEM, including level 3 Cyber Security Technician, level 4 Software Developer and level 6 Civil Engineer (degree).
- Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) in STEM, such as a foundation degree in biomedical sciences, Higher National Certificate in electronic systems, or Higher National Diploma in space technologies.

HTQs are level 4 to 5 qualifications, approved and quality marked by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education as providing skills in demand by employers. To date, 169 HTQs have been approved across Digital, Construction, and Health and Science routes.

In October, the department expanded eligibility for retention incentives to include early career FE teachers in key STEM and technical subjects. FE teachers can apply for the payment between 14 October 2024 and 31 March 2025 on GOV.UK accessible here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/targeted-retention-incentive-payments-for-fe-teachers>. This targeted retention incentive gives eligible teachers in disadvantaged schools and all colleges up to £6,000 after tax. This has doubled the previous retention payments paid to school teachers and is now available to eligible teachers at all FE colleges, for the first time.

Access to future employers is critical for young people making decisions on their careers and it should not be limited to who they or their parents and guardians know. The department's ambition is to offer a guarantee of two weeks' worth of high-quality work experience to all young people, irrespective of their background.

To support young people with careers information, advice and guidance, the Careers and Enterprise Company, back by £30 million of government funding in 2024/25, coordinates a national network of Careers Hubs which now includes 93% of secondary schools and colleges. The network includes 400 leading employers and around 4,000 business volunteers, including many in STEM occupations. The department's careers framework, the Gatsby Benchmarks, includes a clear expectation that all 11 to 18-year-olds should have at least one meaningful interaction with employers per year. This should include a STEM-focused encounter or event before year 11.

■ Graduates: North West**Sarah Hall:** [\[15953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the impact of graduate skills on the North West economy.

Sarah Hall: [\[15954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the contribution of universities to economic growth through graduate outcomes.

Janet Daby:

English higher education (HE) providers generate around 300,000 first degree UK graduates each year, and over 100,000 post-graduates.

These graduates generate significant economic impact: working first degree graduates in 2023 earned on average £6,500 more than non-graduates, which represents a proxy for their additional economic productivity. Graduates are also more likely to be employed, with 87.7% of working age (16 to 64 years old) first degree graduates in employment in 2023, compared to 69.7% of non-graduates. Further, graduates are critical in meeting skills shortages in priority areas, with 67% of working age first degree graduates in high-skilled employment in 2023, compared to 23.7% of non-graduates. Universities UK has estimated that the total economic impact of graduate skills from HE teaching and learning in 2021/22 will be £95 billion spread across the UK.

Over 35,000 of these first degree graduates generated each year, and over 15,000 of the post-graduates, live in the North-West. Universities UK has estimated that first degree graduates in the North-West earn on average 36% more than non-graduates by age 31, and that the economic impact of teaching and learning from the North-West's 18 HE providers has an economic impact of £9.85 billion annually.

■ Higher Education: Teachers**Dan Tomlinson:** [\[16091\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her policies on higher education reform will include employment rights protections for (a) permanent and (b) non-permanent lecturers.

Janet Daby:

The government wants to work in partnership with the higher education (HE) sector to deliver the change that the country needs. The department has outlined its five strategic priorities for the sector and will set out its plan for HE reform by summer 2025, to ensure the system delivers against these priorities.

HE providers are independent from government, and as such government does not have a role in workforce matters, including in staff contracts or pay and provision at specific providers.

However, the department does recognise the financial environment of the HE sector is increasingly challenging, for both HE providers and for staff. We are aware that some providers are making difficult decisions around staffing in order to safeguard their financial sustainability.

The department will continue to work on building strong relationships with sector bodies and unions to better understand the issues facing the sector and its workforce. Departmental officials are working closely with the sector to find practical ways forward to address the challenges faced, and with officials at the Department for Business and Trade on the provisions of the Employment Rights Bill.

This government is committed to creating a secure future for our world-leading universities so they can deliver for workers, students, taxpayers and the economy.

On employment rights protections more generally, the government's plan to Make Work Pay sets out an ambitious agenda to ensure employment rights are fit for a modern economy, empower working people and contribute to economic growth. Once implemented, it will represent the biggest upgrade of workers' rights in a generation.

■ **Non-teaching Staff: Pay**

Laurence Turner:

[16380]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 15056 on Non-teaching Staff: Pay, if she will provide a version of that table further broken down by (a) local authority maintained, (b) academy and (c) free school employer status.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on the school workforce is published in the 'School Workforce in England' statistical publication here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

The attached table provides the pay ranges reported for support staff post contracts broken down by school type in the November 2023 school workforce census, which is the latest data available.

Support staff may have more than one contract, therefore individuals may be counted more than once.

School support staff play a vital role in children's education and development. The department values and recognises the professionalism of the entire school workforce and will address recruitment and retention challenges by reinstating the School Support Staff Negotiating Body.

This Body will be tasked with establishing a national terms and conditions handbook, training and progression routes, thereby ensuring that schools can recruit and retain the staff needed to deliver high-quality, inclusive education.

Attachments:

1. Headcount and Proportion of Support Staff Table [16380_attachment_Support_Staff_Pay_Scales.xlsx]

■ Nuclear Power: Vocational Education**Charlotte Nichols:****[15025]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take to help increase the number of students entering the civil nuclear sector.

Janet Daby:

Nuclear power production is making a crucial contribution to the UK's Clean Energy Superpower Mission. This contribution relies on a highly skilled workforce. The government and industry are working together to increase the number of students across academic and technical education that enter the nuclear sector. The government's reforms of England's skills system, including through the Growth and Skills Levy, the work of Skills England and the Post-16 Strategy, will support the sector's access to the talent that it needs.

The National Nuclear Strategic Plan for Skills, which the government developed in partnership with industry, will also help address the workforce needs of the civil and defence nuclear sectors. The Plan, published by the Nuclear Skills Delivery Group, is available here: <https://nuclearskillsdeliverygroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/NSDG-National-Nuclear-Strategic-Plan-For-Skills.pdf>.

The government's current skills offer in England is already helping meet the needs of the nuclear sector. There are seven nuclear-specific occupational standards which underpin apprenticeships. Other apprenticeships are also crucial to the construction and operation of nuclear power plants, including project manager (level 6), and maintenance and operations engineering technician (level 3).

The 'Free Courses for Jobs' offer includes two nuclear sector-specific qualifications: the ECITB level 3 Certificate and Diploma in Nuclear Engineering and Science.

A range of Skills Bootcamps are available in nuclear specific and nuclear supportive courses.

Higher education plays a key role in supplying the civil nuclear sector with the skills it needs. Sector specific provision is important, particularly at postgraduate level, but more general courses are also vital to a healthy skills supply for the sector.

■ Pre-school Education: Employers' Contributions**Damian Hinds:****[16132]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will adjust the funding formula for early years education to allow for the increase in employer National Insurance contributions.

Stephen Morgan:

I refer the right hon. Member for East Hampshire to the answer of 8 November 2024 to question [12070](#).

■ Pupils: Absenteeism**Ian Sollom:****[16265]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many teaching hours have been missed by persistently absent pupils with SEND in the 2023-24 school year.

Stephen Morgan:

Information on pupil absence, including persistent absence and breakdowns by pupil characteristics, is published in the 'Pupil absence in schools in England' statistical release. This can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2022-23>.

The most recent data available is for the autumn and spring terms of the 2023/24 academic year. Data for the full 2023/24 academic year will be published in March 2025.

Data is collected in sessions as opposed to hours missed. One session is equal to half a day. The number of overall absence sessions for persistent absentees, broken down by special educational need status, can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/dabc07e5-3cb8-48ca-7115-08dd0ae16946>.

Neil Duncan-Jordan:**[16378]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the impact of living in a low income household on rates of school absences.

Stephen Morgan:

The department publishes absence data for pupils broken down by pupil characteristic. This includes data for pupils who are eligible for free school meals (FSM). The latest absence data can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2023-and-spring-2024>.

To support the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, pupil premium funding in the 2024/25 financial year has increased to over £2.9 billion. Pupil premium funding is allocated to eligible schools based on the number of pupils who are recorded as eligible for FSM or have been recorded as eligible in the past six years (referred to as Ever 6 FSM), as well as children who are looked after by the local authority or have been adopted from care or left care. In line with the pupil premium 'menu of approaches', schools can spend their pupil premium on evidence-based strategies to support attendance.

More broadly, the department's 'Working together to improve school attendance' statutory guidance sets clear expectations that where pupils face additional barriers which affect their attendance, schools should work with these families and put support in place to help them to attend. Where the barriers are outside of the school's control, all local partners should work together to support pupils and parents to access support to ensure regular attendance. The guidance can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf.

■ Pupils: Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe:

[16280]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many teachers have formally raised concern about the age of irregular migrant students in each of the last five years.

Catherine McKinnell:

Concerns of this nature would be raised with the individual local authority children's services team which has responsibility for the unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, therefore the department does not hold data on this.

■ School Leaving

Laurence Turner:

[16374]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the report by her Department entitled Academic year 2022/23: Progression to higher education or training, published on 24 October 2024, how many and what proportion of students who left 16-to-18 study in each year between 2015-16 and 2020-21 in (a) Birmingham, (b) West Midlands and (c) England progressed to a sustained level 4 or higher destination, broken down by whether those students received (i) an education, health and care plan, (ii) SEN Support provision and (iii) no SEND provision.

Janet Daby:

The department publishes information on the percentage of level 3 pupils continuing to a sustained education or training destination at level 4 or higher, such as degrees, higher apprenticeships and higher national diplomas.

The data in the links below contain the data requested.

Data pertaining to England can be accessed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/7eb58822-e8ec-4240-f93b-08dd0adc50ad>.

Data pertaining to Birmingham and West Midlands can be accessed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/dd7c6d4b-5aff-4639-f93f-08dd0adc50ad>.

The data provided is for state-funded mainstream schools and state-funded mainstream colleges. Special educational needs (SEN) status is only recorded for students leaving schools. Students in colleges are recorded as learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. The definitions differ from SEN recorded by schools and so the data is therefore presented separately to the data for SEN. Breakdowns by education health and care plan and SEN support are not readily available in the progression to higher education or training data so only "identified SEN" and "no identified SEN" have been provided.

Laurence Turner:

[16375]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the report by her Department entitled Academic year 2022/23: Key stage 4 destination measures, published on 24 October 2024, how many and what proportion of students who left key stage 4 study in each year between 2015-16 and 2020-21 in (a) Birmingham, (b) West Midlands and (c) England progressed to a sustained (i) education, (ii) employment and (iii) apprenticeships, broken down by whether those students received (A) an education, health and care plan, (B) SEN Support provision and (C) no SEND provision.

Janet Daby:

The department publishes information on the destinations of pupils from state-funded mainstream schools in the year following completion of key stage 4, which shows the numbers and percentages of pupils continuing to a sustained education, employment or apprenticeship destination in England.

The tables in the links below contain the data requested.

Data pertaining to England can be accessed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/0b20e9b5-2fef-47b9-7106-08dd0ae16946>.

Data pertaining to Birmingham and the West Midlands can be accessed here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/775f4fb7-7c15-495d-f93a-08dd0adc50ad>.

■ Schools: Concrete

Munira Wilson:

[16364]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many state-funded schools have been (a) temporarily and (b) permanently closed due to unsafe buildings in each year since 2019; and if she will list all the schools affected.

Munira Wilson:

[16365]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the number of educational settings that had reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete in their buildings on 26 November 2024.

Munira Wilson:

[16366]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many schools have been granted funding for RAAC removal as of 26 November 2024.

Munira Wilson:

[16367]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many schools have successfully completed work to remove reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete.

Munira Wilson:

[16368]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many schools included in the School Rebuilding Programme to (a) rebuild and (b) refurbish buildings where reinforced

autoclaved aerated concrete is present have (i) seen contracts awarded, (ii) initiated construction work and (iii) completed construction work.

Stephen Morgan:

The department provides capital funding, guidance and support to help responsible bodies and their schools effectively manage their school buildings. It is the responsibility of those who run schools – academy trusts, local authorities and voluntary-aided school bodies – to ensure their schools are safe, well-maintained and compliant with relevant regulations, and alert the department if there is a significant concern with a building. Local authorities and academy trusts do not need to report building closures to the department. Therefore, the department does not hold this data. The department does provide support on a case-by-case basis, working with the sector if it is alerted to a serious safety issue. The department always puts the safety and wellbeing of children and staff in schools and colleges at the heart of our policy decisions.

There are over 22,000 schools and colleges in England. The number of schools and colleges with confirmed reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) was 237, or around 1%. The department has committed to resolving this problem of RAAC as quickly as possible.

Where the presence of RAAC has been confirmed, the government is funding its removal from schools and colleges in England. The department has committed to resolving this problem as quickly as possible, permanently removing RAAC either through grant funding or the School Rebuilding Programme (SRP). Permanently removing RAAC may involve refurbishment of existing buildings or rebuilding affected buildings.

For schools and colleges receiving grants, it is for individual responsible bodies to develop project plans that suit their individual circumstances, drawing on the department's support as needed. The scope and cost of each project will vary depending on the extent of the issue and nature and design of the buildings. Grants are agreed with responsible bodies and we support them as they take this forward.

As of 27 November 2024, 30 schools, where works are being delivered by responsible bodies via grant funding, have informed us they have permanently removed RAAC.

A total of 122 schools with confirmed RAAC have been included in SRP. Once a school enters delivery, a project team will carry out a feasibility study which will determine the scope of the works. SRP projects take on average 3 to 5 years to complete.

■ **Schools: Repairs and Maintenance**

Munira Wilson:

[\[16369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what progress has been made on the Condition Data Collection 2 programme; and how many schools have been assessed under the programme.

Stephen Morgan:

The Condition Data Collection 2 (CDC2) programme is collecting condition, contextual and building management data for every government-funded school in England. CDC2 is collecting data on over 22,000 educational establishments between 2021 and 2026.

To date, the programme has visited 18,248 schools and released 15,912 CDC2 reports to schools, which represents 83% of the total number of schools to be visited and 72% of the total number of reports to be released to schools.

Schools: Standards**Neil O'Brien:**[\[15823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many (a) primary and (b) secondary schools were (i) newly graded inadequate or (ii) received a second consecutive Requires Improvement by Ofsted in each year since 2010.

Catherine McKinnell:

This is a matter for His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston directly and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Special Educational Needs**Ian Sollom:**[\[16264\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many pupils had applications to state-funded mainstream schools rejected due to the school being unable to meet their identified SEND requirements in the 2023-24 school year.

Catherine McKinnell:

School applications and admissions are handled by the local authority and individual schools' admission authorities. Therefore, the department does not hold information on the reasons for applications to state-funded schools being refused.

All mainstream, state-funded schools must comply with the statutory 'school admissions code' and with equalities legislation. The code is clear that admission authorities must not discriminate against disabled children or those with special educational needs (SEN), and that their admission arrangements will not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child with a disability or SEN. The school admissions code can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1001050/School_admissions_code_2021.pdf.

A parent refused a place at a school they have applied for must be offered the right to appeal to an independent appeal panel.

More information on school applications and appeals can be found here:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/secondary-and-primary-school-applications-and-offers>, and here: <https://explore-education->

statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/admission-appeals-in-england#releaseHeadlines-tables.

■ Special Educational Needs: Croydon

Natasha Irons:

[15951]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what additional SEND funding will be allocated to Croydon.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

The department is providing an increase of almost £1 billion for high needs budgets in the 2025/26 financial year, bringing total high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND to £11.9 billion. Of that total, Croydon Council is being allocated a provisional high needs funding amount of over £97 million through the national funding formula (NFF), which is a 7% increase per head of their 2 to 18-year-old population, on their equivalent 2024/25 financial year NFF allocation. The allocations have been published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026>.

Croydon Council will also be allocated extra funding for pay and pensions costs in special schools and AP. This funding is additional to the allocations through the high needs NFF, and the department will confirm shortly how the funding allocations will be calculated.

■ Special Educational Needs: Epilepsy

Dan Tomlinson:

[16090]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure all children with epilepsy receive an individual healthcare plan.

Catherine McKinnell:

Statutory guidance on 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions' recommends the use of individual healthcare plans as good practice. This guidance can be accessed here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ce6a72e40f0b620a103bd53/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions.pdf>. Individual healthcare plans can help schools support pupils with medical conditions, providing clarity about what needs to be done, when and by whom. The school, healthcare professionals and parents should agree, based on evidence, when a healthcare plan would be appropriate.

The department will keep the statutory guidance under review as we take forward the commitment to delivering an inclusive mainstream system.

■ Special Educational Needs: Hertfordshire

Daisy Cooper:

[\[15835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her planned timetable is for announcing what proportion of SEND funding from Autumn Budget 2024 will be allocated to Hertfordshire.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

The department is providing an increase of almost £1 billion for high needs budgets in the 2025/26 financial year, bringing total high needs funding for children and young people with complex SEND to £11.9 billion. Of that total, Hertfordshire County Council is being allocated a provisional high needs funding amount of over £205 million through the national funding formula (NFF), which is a 9.8% increase per head of their 2 to 18-year-old population, on their equivalent 2024/25 financial year NFF allocation. The allocations have been published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026>.

Hertfordshire County Council will also be allocated extra funding for pay and pensions costs in special schools and AP. This funding is additional to the allocations through the high needs NFF, and the department will confirm shortly how the funding allocations will be calculated.

■ Special Educational Needs: Visual Impairment

Michelle Welsh:

[\[15973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure adequate access to education for children who are certified blind in Sherwood Forest constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

It is the responsibility of local authorities, schools, and further education settings to commission appropriately qualified staff to support the education of children and young people in their area. All schools have duties under the Equality Act 2010 towards individual disabled children and young people. They must make reasonable adjustments to prevent them being put at a substantial disadvantage. To teach a class of pupils with vision impairments, a teacher is required to hold the relevant Mandatory Qualification for Sensory Impairment (MQSI). The department is

committed to ensuring a steady supply of teachers of children with vision impairment in both specialist and mainstream settings.

The Children and Families Act 2014 requires all local authorities to publish a local offer of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in their area, to ensure that families are aware of services that are available in their area and are able to contribute to shaping the services to meet local needs. Information about the support available for children with sensory impairment should be included within that local offer.

■ **Students: Fees and Charges**

Sir Gavin Williamson:

[\[16169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of (a) the number of students who will not be charged the increased annual tuition fee due to their contracts preventing a change in fees once they have started their degree and (b) the total cost of this differential for universities.

Janet Daby:

Higher education providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own fees under the fee cap.

In deciding whether or not to increase fees, providers will want to ensure that they can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and help students achieve their ambitions. For continuing students, this will depend on providers' individual contracts with students, and they will wish to make their own legal assessment of this.

The department plans to publish an assessment of impacts, including on equality, of the planned tuition fee and student finance changes shortly.

■ **Teachers: Labour Turnover**

Sarah Hall:

[\[15968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help increase the retention of female teachers in male-dominated subjects in schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government has a central mission to break down barriers to opportunity and boost life chances for every child. High-quality teaching is the factor that makes the biggest difference to a child's education, with teachers helping to shape the lives of young people. Yet this government has inherited a context of poor recruitment and worsening teacher retention resulting in shortages of qualified teachers across the country. This is why the government has set out the ambition to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers across our schools, both mainstream and specialist, and our colleges over the course of this parliament.

The department is focused on retention alongside recruitment to ensure teachers, no matter their gender or background, stay and thrive in the profession. As of 14

October, eligible early career teachers in priority science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and technical subjects can claim targeted retention incentive payments worth up to £6,000 after tax, with payments made available to college teachers in key STEM and technical subjects for the first time.

Ensuring people from all backgrounds can thrive as teachers is also a question of social justice, a priority for the government, ensuring that all individuals have equal economic and social opportunities. It is important that the teaching profession reflects the communities it serves and that children see themselves reflected in the role models around them.

Improving the experience of the profession for all teachers, for example through the department's programmes on flexible working, wellbeing and workload, can also remove barriers to a successful career for many groups of teachers. Groups who may benefit in particular include those with caring responsibility, those with disabilities or teachers within particular age groups who require more flexibility in their working lives. For example, teachers can undertake their planning, preparation and assessment time remotely.

The department is also delivering a programme focused on embedding flexible working in schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs). This includes the delivery of supportive webinars and peer support provided by flexible working ambassador schools and MATs.

We have also made available a range of resources to help address teacher workload and wellbeing, including the 'Improve workload and wellbeing for school staff' service, which is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/improve-workload-and-wellbeing-for-school-staff>, and the 'Education staff wellbeing charter', available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter>.

■ Training: Finance

Neil O'Brien: [\[14971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to allow firms to use up to 50% of the Growth And Skills Levy to fund non-apprenticeship training.

Neil O'Brien: [\[15013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate his Department has made of the number of people starting apprenticeships in each year of this Parliament.

Janet Daby:

This government's reformed growth and skills offer, with apprenticeships at the heart, will deliver greater flexibility for learners and employers, aligned with our industrial strategy, creating routes into good, skilled jobs in growing industries, such as in construction, digital and green skills.

As a first step, this will include shorter duration and foundation apprenticeships in targeted sectors, helping more people learn new high-quality skills at work, fuelling

innovation in businesses across the country, and providing high-quality entry pathways for young people.

The department does not publish estimates of the number of future apprenticeship starts. The new government has inherited a context of a declining number of apprenticeship starts. Following reforms to apprenticeships, including the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017, apprenticeship starts by young people under 25 fell by 38% between the 2015/16 and 2022/23 academic years, with an overall decline in starts of 34%. Apprenticeship starts figures are published here:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships>.

The department is in the process of designing the growth and skills offer and it will set out more detail in due course.

■ Youth Endowment Fund

Laurence Turner:

[16373]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Answer of 10 May 2024 to Question 24203 on Youth Endowment Fund, whether it remains her Department's policy to (a) fund and (b) promote the alternative provision specialist taskforce programmes.

Catherine McKinnell:

The alternative provision specialist taskforces (APST) programme has placed multi-professional teams, including youth workers, family workers and speech and language therapists, within alternative provision (AP) in 22 areas in England. The objective of the APST is to holistically respond to the needs of children requiring AP, which includes some of the country's most disadvantaged children, to address the multiple barriers preventing them engaging in education, achieving and thriving and being safe.

The department is sharing learning on APST to benefit areas outside of the pilot which may wish to adopt the approach, to strengthen provision for children within AP or on the cusp of permanent exclusion. This information can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-specialist-taskforces-apst>.

The APST pilot is jointly funded by the department and the government Shared Outcomes Fund until March 2025. Departmental officials will continue to support pilot areas, including Birmingham, on planning for March 2025 onward.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Agriculture: Land Use

Bradley Thomas:

[16046]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of multiple solar farms on the local environment;

whether he has had discussions with the the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on the impact of solar farms on the rural (a) landscape and (b) communities; and if he will take steps to ensure that those farms are distributed over a wide area.

Michael Shanks:

Although the precise location of energy infrastructure is a matter for developers, planning guidance sets out that the cumulative impact of solar developments located close to each other can be a factor in planning decisions. This impact should be considered by decision-makers.

Officials are in regular contact with their counterparts at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with whom they work closely on matters related to the rural impacts of solar farms.

■ **Aquind: Electricity Interconnectors**

Amanda Martin:

[\[16873\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when he will publish a decision on the AQUIND Interconnector project.

Michael Shanks:

The Secretary of State continues to follow the process stated in his letter of 12 July 2024 to AQUIND Limited and the Ministry of Defence regarding considering the MOD's representations. The 12 July 2024 letter and further updates can be found on the Planning Inspectorate's website for the AQUIND Interconnector planning application. There is no statutory deadline for determining this application.

■ **Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage**

Wera Hobhouse:

[\[15801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of adding carbon capture, utilisation and storage costs onto household bills.

Sarah Jones:

We have created several business models to fund CCUS projects, designed to ensure value for money whilst providing long term sight of revenue streams for investors. CCUS will be funded by a mixture of exchequer and levy sources, the exact split to be determined in due course. Negotiations with projects are ongoing and therefore commercially confidential. Final awards will be published on the UK subsidy database. We will continue to learn from the first clusters as they approach Final Investment Decisions and apply these lessons to further development of CCUS to ensure that it delivers value for money.

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[15963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the viability of carbon capture technologies.

Sarah Jones:

Carbon capture technology has been proven in many countries across the world, and the Climate Change Committee have described it as a “necessity not an option” for reaching Net Zero. As a part of the initial assessment for choosing the first CCUS clusters, projects were assessed against five criteria including deliverability, under which technical viability was considered.

Abtisam Mohamed:[\[16250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate his Department has made of the potential cost to the public purse of carbon capture technologies in each of the next three years.

Sarah Jones:

The Autumn Budget settlement provides £3.9bn in 2025-26 for the first carbon capture and storage clusters in the UK. The breakdown of costs by financial year is commercially sensitive whilst negotiations progress. The cost of carbon capture after 2025-26 will be disclosed following the conclusion of the second phase of the Spending Review.

Carbon Emissions**Tom Hayes:**[\[16401\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with the National Energy Security Operator on the potential (a) marginal and (b) lifecycle carbon emissions from (i) gas with carbon capture and storage (CSS), (ii) bioenergy with CSS, (iii) on-shore wind and (iv) nuclear energy.

Michael Shanks:

Details of Ministers' and Permanent Secretaries' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK.

Published declarations include the purpose of the meeting and the names of any additional external organisations or individuals in attendance.

Consumer Goods: Carbon Emissions**Dr Simon Opher:**[\[16660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of implementing advertising restrictions on high carbon emission products (a) on television and (b) online.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Government is committed to reducing emissions from high carbon products and will continue to bring forward proposals to do so.

The Committees of Advertising Practice and Advertising Standards Authority regulate the content and targeting of advertising in the UK, both on television and online, and the advertising codes include rules on environmental claims. The ASA system operates independently of the Government.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Energy**Rupert Lowe:** [\[16316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what information his Department holds on the proportion of energy used by his Department, broken down by energy source.

Michael Shanks:

The Department collects data on its energy use, broken down by energy source, and reports this to Defra on a quarterly basis as part of the Greening Government Commitments.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Food**Rupert Lowe:** [\[16314\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, on what proportion of days is (a) meat and (b) dairy available in canteens in his Department.

Michael Shanks:

The Department is a customer of the Government Property Agency (GPA). GPA is the landlord or building manager at the Department's office occupations, where the space is often shared with several other tenant organisations. The Department buys catering services, or a share of, from GPA alongside all other building services. This information is therefore not held by the Department.

Rupert Lowe: [\[16315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an estimate of the proportion of food provided in canteens in his Department that is produced in the UK.

Michael Shanks:

The Department is a customer of the Government Property Agency (GPA). GPA is the landlord or building manager at the Department's office occupations, where the space is often shared with several other tenant organisations. The Department buys catering services, or a share of, from GPA alongside all other building services. This information is therefore not held by the Department.

■ Electric Cables: Housing**James McMurdock:** [\[16411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of large electricity pylons on housing prices.

Michael Shanks:

The Government does not assess the impact of new transmission network infrastructure on house prices.

Landowners, businesses and homeowners that have electrical equipment, such as pylons or towers, sited on their land have the right to compensation for the value of

their land, as well as for any losses or expenses incurred. Acquiring authorities can also put in place discretionary schemes offering additional compensation.

More broadly, government is committed to ensuring that communities who live near new clean energy infrastructure can see the benefits and is currently considering how to deliver this most effectively.

■ Electricity Generation: Finance

Luke Murphy: [\[15999\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of independent networks in delivering network investment.

Michael Shanks:

Independent network operators have an important role to play in delivering electricity network investment and, as such, are an enabler of the Government's clean energy superpower and economic growth missions. As well as supporting investment in clean energy and low carbon technologies, independent networks contribute to the delivery of a smart and flexible electricity system and of grid connections for new housing developments.

■ Electricity Generation: Infrastructure

Luke Murphy: [\[15997\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what progress he has made on the creation of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Taskforce; and whether his Department plans to bring forward reforms to landowner compensation for the delivery of new infrastructure.

Michael Shanks:

The previous Government established an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Taskforce of experts and representatives from relevant sectors. This government has reconvened the Taskforce and it met on 27 November. The Taskforce will in due course deliver a report to Ministers outlining its proposals on ADR for resolving compensation disputes between landowners hosting infrastructure and network operators, which we shall consider before deciding on next steps.

Luke Murphy: [\[15998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department plans to respond to the call for evidence entitled Land rights and consents for electricity network infrastructure, which closed on 15 September 2022.

Michael Shanks:

The Government has made it a priority to review current land rights and consents processes and whether they are fit to facilitate meeting the government's mission for clean power by 2030.

We published our response to the Call for Evidence on 2 December, which summarises the responses received from stakeholders to questions on land rights and consents. It also sets out a number of quick-win reforms government is in the process of implementing and announces the government's plan to consult on further changes.

■ Electricity Interconnectors

Dame Caroline Dinéage: [\[16141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what data his Department holds on the amount of energy transmitted by IFA2 since 1 September 2024.

Michael Shanks:

The National Energy System Operator publishes data on interconnector flows on its Data Portal. Historical data is available as part of the Historical Demand Data series, while more timely data is available in the Daily Demand Update.

■ Energy: Business

Tom Hayes: [\[16069\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to (a) encourage commercial property owners to improve energy efficiency and (b) reduce energy wastage, in the context of duties set out in Section 1 of the Climate Change Act 2008.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Commercial landlords are already required to meet Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards to improve energy efficiency and the Government has consulted on strengthening these, and we will publish the response early next year. Our energy advice service pilot in the West Midlands is delivering subsidised energy assessments and grant funding for energy efficiency measures to Small and Medium Enterprise's (SMEs) in the region and we are currently considering options for longer term support for SME decarbonisation. Mandatory energy audits required under the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme also provide large businesses with cost-effective ways to save energy and reduce bills.

Tom Hayes: [\[16070\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of introducing (a) new incentives and (b) funding streams to support energy (i) audits and (ii) efficiency improvements in commercial properties.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Commercial landlords are already required to meet Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards to improve energy efficiency and the Government has consulted on strengthening these, which we will publish the response to early next year.

Through the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme, large businesses must undertake energy audits and are encouraged to make energy efficiency improvements. We are currently providing audits and grants to SMEs as part of a pilot with the West Midlands Combined Authority, to identify and provide grants for energy efficiency measures for businesses.

More detail on the Government's approach to decarbonising non-domestic buildings, including through the Warm Homes Plan, will be published in due course.

■ Energy: Conservation

Tom Hayes:

[\[16071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what enforcement mechanisms his Department plans to put in place under ESOS Phase 4 to help ensure that companies comply with required energy efficiency measures.

Sarah Jones:

The energy saving measures identified in audits by large businesses in scope of the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme (ESOS) are currently voluntary to implement. ESOS participants are however required to submit actions plan and progress reports which can include information on proposed implementation of audit recommendations.

The approach to enforcement in England, including civil penalties where ESOS requirements are not met, is set out in the Environment Agency's enforcement and sanctions policy.

These arrangements were in place in Phase 3 of Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme, and the Government has not announced any plans to make further changes in Phase 4.

Tom Hayes:

[\[16072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of (a) reinstating and (b) expanding (i) local grant funding schemes previously funded through EU initiatives and (ii) other local grant funding schemes to support (A) energy efficiency and (B) renewable energy projects.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Government recognises the importance of local initiatives in driving net zero action and provides initiatives, including funding, to help achieve this.

On energy efficiency, Government will partner with local and combined authorities to roll out the Warm Homes Plan. Government is also using devolution deals with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities to pilot new approaches to funding retrofit from 2025.

In addition, Government funds five Local Net Zero Hubs which support local authorities to develop net zero projects, including those relating to energy efficiency and renewable energy, and to attract commercial investment.

Great British Energy's Local Power Plan will also provide commercial, technical and project-planning assistance, increasing capacity and capability to build a pipeline of successful projects in local areas.

Tom Hayes:

[\[16073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to provide long-term funding for (a) local energy efficiency and (b) net zero initiatives.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government recognises the importance of local action to help realise our national net zero targets.

On energy efficiency, Government will partner with combined and local authorities to roll out the Warm Homes Plan . We are also using devolution deals with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities to pilot new approaches to funding retrofit from 2025 and are exploring how we can build on these for other areas.

To support net zero initiatives, Government funds five Local Net Zero Hubs which support local authorities to develop net zero projects, including those relating to energy efficiency and renewable energy, and to attract commercial investment.

Great British Energy's Local Power Plan will also provide commercial, technical and project-planning assistance, increasing capacity and capability to build a pipeline of successful projects in local areas.

Tom Hayes:

[\[16668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of integration of AI-enabled battery storage technologies in increasing the energy efficiency of homes and businesses.

Michael Shanks:

Decarbonising heating is one of the biggest challenges facing the UK. Reducing energy demand and powering homes with green energy is a key priority within the Clean Energy by 2030 Mission. A range of technologies to heat the home of the future are likely to be required including flexible technologies such as battery storage.

More generally, the Home Energy Model (HEM) is a calculation methodology designed to assess the energy performance of homes and is set to replace the Standard Assessment Procedure. Consultations on the proposed HEM closed in March 2024 and the Government will respond to the consultation in due course.

■ Energy: Exports

Tom Hayes:

[\[16387\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will take steps to make the UK a net exporter of power by 2030.

Michael Shanks:

The Government will shortly publish the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan which will outline our approach to delivering a clean electricity system which will ensure our energy security, help tackle the climate crisis, create good jobs and protect billpayers. NESO's report on achieving clean power by 2030 showed that it is possible for the UK to generate more clean energy than it consumes, creating the scope to export excess clean power to other countries via interconnectors which will enable us to trade energy with some of our closest European allies.

Energy: Supply Chains**Sarah Champion:**[\[16151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on potential steps to ensure UK energy supply chains are free from Uyghur forced labour.

Michael Shanks:

The Government opposes all forms of forced labour, including the use of Uyghur forced labour, and is determined to ensure that all UK business do everything in their power to remove any instances of it from their supply chains.

Through the reconvened Solar Taskforce, the Government is working widely across Whitehall and closely with industry stakeholders to take forward the actions needed to develop supply chains that are resilient, sustainable, innovative, and free from forced labour. These actions will be set out in the Solar Roadmap, which is expected to be published in Spring 2025.

Heating: Finance**Wera Hobhouse:**[\[15802\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans he has for increased (a) funding for the Boiler Upgrade Scheme and (b) support for additional low-carbon heating technologies.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

On 21 November the Government announced £30 million of additional budget for the Boiler Upgrade Scheme for this financial year in response to increased uptake to the scheme. It was also confirmed that the scheme budget for the next financial year will be almost doubled to £295 million. Budgets for subsequent years will be confirmed in the second phase of the Spending Review.

The Government has also announced support for social housing and lower income households through the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund and Warm Homes: Local Grant which includes support for low carbon heating.

■ Renewable Energy

Tom Hayes: [\[16076\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans he has to (a) support and (b) incentivise (i) small businesses and (ii) contractors to enter the renewable energy installation market.

Sarah Jones:

The Government has introduced the £5 million Heat Training Grant, supporting trainees in England taking training relevant to heat pumps and heat networks. For heat pumps, the grant is designed to support businesses with 250 employees or fewer, including sole traders.

Through the reconvened Solar Taskforce, we are identifying and taking forward the actions needed to develop supply chains and a high skilled, well-paid solar workforce. These actions will be set out in the Solar Roadmap, which is expected to be published in Spring 2025.

DESNZ is also engaging closely with wider reforms to the skills system, including the creation of Skills England and the new Growth and Skills Offer. Our Office for Clean Energy Jobs will ensure we have the skilled workforce we need for the net zero transition, and good jobs are spread across the country.

Tom Hayes: [\[16407\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the (a) effectiveness of the Contracts for Difference scheme and (b) potential scope for reforming investment mechanisms in renewable energy capacity.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is committed to accelerating renewables deployment to meet clean power 2030 and the Contracts for Difference scheme will continue to be an important element of this. We are working with industry to consider ways this scheme and other energy policies can evolve to deliver our clean power goal.

■ Renewable Energy: Northern Ireland

Claire Hanna: [\[16566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether the Clean Power 2030 Advisory Commission will consider matters relating to Northern Ireland.

Michael Shanks:

Energy policy is largely devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE). As such the Clean Power 2030 Advisory Commission is focused on decarbonisation of the power system in Great Britain. However, we are keen to share learnings from this process with colleagues in Northern Ireland and will work with them to this end as NIE produces its own plan to decarbonise the power sector, which will receive UK government support.

■ Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme

Tom Hayes: [\[16081\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of reforming the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive scheme to help reduce the cost for installers.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government does not plan to reform the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive in order to reduce the cost for installers. The scheme closed to new applications at the end of March 2022 and no new installations have been carried out since that date.

■ Solar Power

Tom Hayes: [\[16077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has plans to revise or increase incentives for (a) solar photovoltaics installations and (b) battery storage solutions to help encourage wider adoption by (i) homeowners and (ii) businesses.

Michael Shanks:

Details of actions being taken to increase deployment of solar power and battery storage will be set out the forthcoming Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, as well as the forthcoming Solar Roadmap.

Since February 2024, the VAT for solar and battery storage has been 0% and will be until March 2027. And as part of the Warm Homes Plan, officials are exploring the role of incentives and private finance to support homeowners with the upfront costs of energy efficiency improvements and low carbon heating, including support for solar and batteries.

Tom Hayes: [\[16408\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will reinstate a three-year delivery window for solar (a) in Allocation Round 7 and (b) beyond.

Michael Shanks:

The Government is committed to accelerating solar deployment to meet clean power 2030 and reviews the Contracts for Difference scheme before every round to ensure it continues to deliver this and other objectives. We will confirm details for Allocation Round 7 in due course.

■ Warm Homes Plan: Insulation

Shaun Davies: [\[16276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to roll out loft insulation protection through the Warm Homes Plan.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government is committed to protecting homeowners across the UK who have clean heating and energy efficiency products installed. The Government's Warm Homes Plan will support investment in insulation, low carbon heating and other home improvements to cut bills. We will set out full details in due course.

As the first step towards the Warm Homes Plan, the Government has committed an initial £3.4 billion over the next 3 years towards heat decarbonisation and household energy efficiency, with £1 billion of this allocated to next year.

■ Warm Homes Plan: Scotland**Gregor Poynton:**[\[16014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department has had discussions with the Scottish Government on (a) facilitating and (b) improving delivery of the Warm Homes Plan across Scotland.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government's ambitious Warm Homes Plan will upgrade millions of homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to run, from installing new insulation to rolling out solar and heat pumps.

We will partner with combined authorities and local and devolved governments to roll out this plan. As such, the department will continue to engage with Scotland and other devolved governments.

■ Warm Homes Plan: Small Businesses**Gregor Poynton:**[\[16013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of taking steps to use the energy efficiency SME supply chain to deliver the Warm Homes Plan.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government's ambitious Warm Homes Plan will upgrade millions of homes across the country by making them cleaner and cheaper to run, from installing insulation to rolling out solar and heat pumps. The Plan will set out proposals to facilitate growth of a robust and competent supply chain to support home upgrades, including investing in training and skills and supporting SMEs to work in the sector.

■ Wind Power**Jim Shannon:**[\[16168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an estimate of the number of (a) onshore and (b) offshore windfarms in the UK.

Michael Shanks:

At the end of 2023 there were (a) 9,627 onshore and (b) 48 offshore wind sites in the UK.

Source: [Regional Renewable Statistics](#)

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Harriet Cross: [\[15990\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the findings of the report entitled An impact analysis of APR reforms on commercial family farms, published by the National Farmers Union on 21 November 2024 on the acreage of land relating to Agricultural Property Relief claims on assets of less than £250,000 in the 2021-22 financial year.

Daniel Zeichner:

That report draws on Defra analysis on asset value. Tax liabilities for individual farm businesses depend on personal circumstances. It is not possible to accurately infer a future inheritance tax liability from data on farm asset values. This is because asset value alone does not necessarily mean that the farm will be affected, as it depends on individual circumstances.

From 6 April 2026, the full 100% relief from inheritance tax will be restricted to the first £1 million of combined agricultural and business property. Above this amount, landowners will access 50% relief from inheritance tax and will pay inheritance tax at a reduced effective rate up to 20%, rather than the standard 40%. This tax can be paid in instalments over 10 years interest free, rather than immediately, as with other types of inheritance tax.

This is on top of all the other spousal exemptions and nil-rate bands that people can access for inheritance tax too. This means that two people with farmland, depending on their circumstances, can pass on up to £3 million without paying any inheritance tax. This is an assumption based on the £1 million limit and nil-rate bands and does not take into consideration the specific circumstances that may affect the tax calculation. Furthermore, if land is transferred 7 years before death, farmers pay no inheritance tax at all.

With 73% of claims being for less than £1 million, the majority of estates will be unaffected, and they will be able to pass the family farm down to their children just as previous generations have always done. This is a fair and balanced approach that protects the family farm while also fixing the public services that we all rely on.

■ Beaches: Rescue Services

Darren Paffey: [\[13942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of lifeguard numbers on UK beaches; and whether he plans to improve beach safety.

Emma Hardy:

We have made no such assessment. However, the responsibility for lifeguards on beaches is usually a matter for local authorities or private beach owners.

Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal**David Simmonds:**[\[14178\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answers of 20 September 2024 to Question 5409 on Recycling and to Question 5225 on Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal, whether it is her policy that the minimum residual frequency for household waste collections should be two weeks.

Mary Creagh:

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

Jim Shannon:[\[15733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of local authorities charging homeowners to dispose of garden waste.

Mary Creagh:

Local authorities have had the option to charge for a garden waste collection since 1992, as per the Controlled Waste (England & Wales) Regulations [2012]. As stated in our most recently published Final Impact Assessment for Simpler Recycling, around 65% of local authorities charged for garden waste collections in 2018/19.

In 2021, the Government consulted on introducing free garden waste collections for all households in England. We explored the impact of this policy in our Final Impact Assessment which included evidence that the average garden waste yield for local authorities who provide a charged service is lower when compared to yields associated with a free service. However, the impact assessment identified that overall, there was not a sufficient economic or environmental case to require local authorities to offer a free garden waste collection service.

Officials are working with WRAP to develop guidance on what is a reasonable charge for garden waste collection and will continue to review the evidence on uptake on garden waste services.

Mr Andrew Snowden:[\[16313\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department will require councils to collect household and food waste separately by March 2026.

Mary Creagh:

Under Simpler Recycling, by 31 March 2026 local authorities in England will be required to provide weekly food waste collections to all households.

■ Environment Agency: Finance**Freddie van Mierlo:** [\[16435\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of trends in the levels of real terms funding to the Environment Agency between 2010 and 2024.

Emma Hardy:

Environment Agency (EA) funding is closely monitored to ensure that the EA can carry out its duties and functions effectively.

Since 2010-11, the EA's funding has risen from £1.3 billion to £2.1 billion in 2024-25. This is a real terms increase of just over £250 million.

■ Environmental Land Management Schemes**Sarah Dyke:** [\[16621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many farmers and land managers successfully applied for capital grants for environmental land management in (a) Glastonbury and Somerton constituency and (b) England in 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

Between 1 January 2024 and 28 November 2024, there have been 6573 successful applications for Capital Grants under the Environmental Land Management Schemes in England in 2024.

The Rural Payment Agency cannot provide constituency data at this time due to the boundary changes earlier this year.

■ Flood control: Bromsgrove**Bradley Thomas:** [\[16593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to help protect rural communities in Bromsgrove constituency from flooding.

Emma Hardy:

Communities at risk of flooding in the Bromsgrove constituency include Hagley, Hollywood and Bromsgrove itself. At present, there have been no reports to the Environment Agency (EA) of property flooding in this constituency during the recent wet weather.

The EA has been supporting Worcestershire County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority and Bromsgrove District Council, to establish flood risk management projects on the 2021-2027 Flood and Coastal Risk Management Investment Programme. Over £300,000 has been invested to date with a further £600,000 planned to be invested over the next 3 years. The projects aim to better protect 155 properties from flooding by March 2027 through Property Level Resilience interventions across Bromsgrove and Redditch Council areas.

The EA are engaging with the community at Hagley and Bromsgrove via flood action groups and responding to direct enquiries from residents.

A Flood Warning Service is available to over 900 homes and businesses at risk of flooding from main rivers in the constituency. The EA will continue to work with partners towards raising awareness of flood risk in the area to support community resilience.

■ Flood Control: Derbyshire

Samantha Niblett:

[\[15899\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of (a) flood risk and (b) storm preparedness in Derbyshire.

Emma Hardy:

Communities in Derbyshire are at risk of flooding from a variety of sources including main rivers, ordinary watercourses, and surface water. During last winter, over 1,600 properties were sadly flooded internally throughout Derbyshire.

The Environment Agency (EA) are responsible for main rivers and maintain a range of flood defences throughout Derbyshire. These protected over 14,000 properties across the county during last winter's storms. Following the floods, defences have been inspected and routine operational checks and maintenance activities have been carried out.

The EA continue to work with Derbyshire County Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, to reduce flood risk and identify future opportunities for investment in flood defences.

The EA monitors river levels, issuing flood warnings 24/7, 365 days a year when required to inform the public and businesses of flood risk. They work closely with Local Resilience Forum partners to plan for, respond to, and recover from flood incidents.

■ Flood Control: Dredging

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[16269\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of dredging on flood mitigation.

Emma Hardy:

Dredging and clearing channels are an important option for watercourse maintenance, where it is technically and cost effective, does not significantly increase flood risk for others downstream, and does not damage the environment and wildlife. Its effectiveness varies substantially for each stretch of watercourse, it is unlikely to be effective in isolation and is usually part of a wider approach. In many cases the silt will quickly build up again.

Where watercourse maintenance is the responsibility of the Environment Agency it focuses its efforts on those activities which will achieve the greatest benefit in terms of protecting people and property from flooding. This includes dredging, which the Environment Agency will undertake an assessment of, working in close consultation with local communities.

■ Flood Control: Finance

Dr Neil Hudson: [\[16528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to paragraph 4.105 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October, if he will maintain spending on flood resilience over the next five years.

Emma Hardy:

We will invest £2.4 billion across 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences. Longer term funding decisions will be made at the next Spending Review.

■ Flood Control: Rural Areas

Leigh Ingham: [\[15147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the defences against flooding in rural areas.

Emma Hardy:

All flood and coastal risk management investment schemes are carefully assessed to make sure they benefit the most people and property.

As I announced on 13 November, additional financial support will be provided to rural communities, recognising the significant impact of flooding on farmers. £50 million will be distributed to internal drainage boards (IDBs), and £60m will be paid to farmers impacted by last year's severe weather: [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).

■ Flood Re: Business

Dr Neil Hudson: [\[16268\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Flood Re scheme to businesses.

Emma Hardy:

Flood Re is a joint government and industry flood reinsurance scheme established specifically to help UK households at high risk of flooding to access affordable insurance. As such, it is funded via a levy on UK household insurers.

Business insurance operates differently to household insurance. It is often bespoke, based on the individual nature of the business. It is important to note that there is no evidence of a systemic problem for businesses being able to access flood insurance.

■ Floods: Paisley and Renfrewshire North

Alison Taylor:

[16646]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment has made of the potential flood risk to communities in Paisley and Renfrewshire North constituency.

Emma Hardy:

This is a devolved matter and the responsibility of the Scottish Government.

■ Incinerators: Construction

Vikki Slade:

[16403]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will (a) undertake a needs assessment for waste disposal and (b) ban new incinerators unless there is a proven need for them.

Mary Creagh:

The Government is committed to transitioning to a circular economy, which will support economic growth, deliver green jobs, promote efficient and productive use of resources, minimise negative environmental impacts and help us accelerate to Net Zero. There will however still be a need for the safe and sanitary management of residual waste. In accordance with the Waste Hierarchy, sending residual waste that cannot currently be prevented, prepared for reuse, or recycled to Energy from Waste plants is preferable to disposal in landfill. We are clear however that we do not support incineration overcapacity.

Before the end of this year, the Government will publish an analysis of residual waste treatment capacity, including waste incineration, in England setting out our future capacity needs to inform future policy directions.

■ Independent Water Commission: Eutrophication

Freddie van Mierlo:

[16068]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether nutrient pollution will be within the remit of the Independent Water Commission; and how the Commission will interact with the rapid review of the Environmental Improvement Plan.

Emma Hardy:

On 23 October, the Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, launched an Independent Commission on the water sector regulatory system, to fundamentally transform how our water system works and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good.

The Terms of Reference for the Independent Commission are available at [here](#).

■ Land Drainage

Mr Connor Rand:

[\[15584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will implement schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

Emma Hardy:

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

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

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

To help inform thinking, the Government asked a question on flooding in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation that concluded in September 2024.

■ Pest Control

Alex Mayer:

[\[15946\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to promote (a) safer and (b) environmentally friendly pest control alternatives to rodenticide for (i) residential and (ii) commercial use.

Mary Creagh:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for approving biocidal products such as rodenticides. To ensure that the risks associated with professional use of anticoagulant rodenticides could be properly managed, the UK Government worked with industry stakeholders and a stewardship regime was developed by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use UK (CRRU) to promote responsible use.

This regime is overseen by a Government Oversight Group (GOG), chaired by HSE. The stewardship regime is currently under review and the outcome is expected in 2025.

CRRU's Code of Best Practice promotes a 'risk hierarchy' when deciding on a rodent control strategy and this aligns with Defra's previously published view that anyone seeking to manage wildlife should consider the most humane method of control and apply the least severe solution to control problem animals.

CRRU advise there are a range of effective methods for successful rodent management including elimination of harbourage, food and water; and certain forms of trapping. Many methods of rodent control, such as spring traps and live capture and release traps, are inexpensive, reusable and widely available to both the general

public and professional pest controllers, whether acting in a residential or commercial setting.

■ **Plastics: Waste**

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[16249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade to reduce exports of plastic waste.

Mary Creagh:

Plastic waste is a commodity which is traded on a legitimate global market. Exports can complement UK based reprocessing to help ensure more materials are recycled rather than landfilled or incinerated. Some of the plastic waste we export is used in the manufacturing of products which UK consumers subsequently purchase, thereby promoting the efficient circular economy we are striving for.

■ **River Mole: Sewage**

Monica Harding:

[\[16589\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 13669 on Rivers: Sewage, which six sewage treatment works in the River Mole catchment have been inspected by the Environment Agency in this financial year.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) has confirmed that the six Wastewater Treatment works (WwTW) inspected in the River Mole Catchment in the current financial year, referenced in the response to [PQ 13669](#) on Rivers: Sewage, are as follows:

- Burstow WwTW
- Crawley WwTW
- Holmwood WwTW
- Horley WwTW
- Merstham WwTW
- Leatherhead WwTW

In the time since the response to Question 13669 was provided, the EA has inspected three additional WwTW in the Rive Mole catchment:

- Warick Wold WwTW
- Colgate WwTW
- Ironsbottom WwTW

The EA has confirmed plans for a fourfold increase in water company inspections – 4000 by end of March 2025 - to hold companies to account, including unannounced inspections.

The increase in inspections will allow the EA to conduct more in-depth and independent audits to get to the root-cause of incidents, reducing the reliance on operator self-monitoring.

■ Rural England Prosperity Fund

Sarah Dyke: [\[15135\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much of the Rural England Prosperity Fund has been spent.

Daniel Zeichner:

Delivery of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) has been devolved to eligible local authorities. This includes assessing and approving project applications, processing payments and day-to-day monitoring. REPF funding is available from April 2023 to March 2025 and all eligible local authorities have confirmed allocations of funding for the two-year period as published.

The latest data we have available for spend is for end of year 1 (March 2024) which showed that £17 million had been paid to projects and in total £71 million had been committed to completed, live or planned projects.

Allocations were weighted 25% year 1 and 75% year 2 for most eligible local authorities to allow development of project pipelines and give time for eligible local authorities to use the full allocations available.

■ Water

Damian Hinds: [\[15417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will (a) commission an independent assessment of the potential (i) environmental and (ii) health impact of using recycled waste water and (b) pause approval of water (A) transfer and (B) recycling projects until that assessment is published.

Emma Hardy:

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

Water re-abstracted from the environment for public water supply must also be treated to meet our high drinking water standards before use, in accordance with a robust risk assessment. [Recent research](#) carried out for the Drinking Water Inspectorate indicated a high level of support (79% agreement) for the use of water recycling to supplement drinking water supplies.

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

There are currently no plans to commission an independent assessment on the potential of using recycled waste water.

■ **Water Companies: Licensing**

Luke Murphy: [\[16000\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with Ofwat on the implementation of a national New Appointment and Variations licence for independent water networks.

Luke Murphy: [\[16001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the cumulative regulatory time spent on the processing of New Appointment and Variations applications for independent water networks in 2023-4.

Emma Hardy:

The Secretary of State has not had any discussion with Ofwat on the implementation of a national New Appointment and Variations licence for independent water networks. Given the principle of regulatory independence, Ofwat conduct their functions at a distance from government.

The licensing of new appointments and variations of appointment is set out in relevant sections of the Water Industry Act 1991 and Ofwat's published policy and process guidance.

Ofwat is currently considering responses to its recent consultation on using monitoring data to evolve its approach to licensing new appointees. This consultation set out proposed changes to the licensing of new appointments and variations, and highlighted areas where it intends to conduct further work.

In 2023-24, Ofwat had around 6 full time equivalent members of staff working on new appointee and variation licensing applications.

■ **Water Supply: Compensation**

Lewis Cocking: [\[15850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure customers are compensated when water companies fail to meet Ofwat targets.

Emma Hardy:

Under new proposals set out by this Government, households and businesses will be entitled to higher payments from water companies when basic services are hit in a

wider range of circumstances – with payments water company customers are legally entitled to when key standards are not met at least doubling.

The Government is also expanding the list of circumstances that can trigger compensation, to include payments for boil notices when drinking water standards drop, and for failures to conduct meter readings or installations as promised. It would mean recent outages in Hastings, Brixham and Bramley earlier this year would have all automatically led to compensation at higher rates for all customers.

■ **Water: Northern Ireland**

Jim Shannon: [\[14614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has had discussions with Northern Ireland Water on water quality in Northern Ireland.

Emma Hardy:

Water is a devolved policy area and so engagement with Northern Ireland Water is a matter for Northern Ireland's Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

■ **Water: Standards**

Martin Wrigley: [\[16642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will provide adequate (a) funding and (b) resources to carry out year round testing for designated bathing water areas in the Newton Abbot constituency.

Emma Hardy:

On 12 November, we launched a public consultation on proposed reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013. A core proposal of this consultation is to move the fixed dates of the bathing season from the Regulations into guidance. This would provide the flexibility to amend bathing season dates based on local context, and for the Environment Agency to monitor outside the current fixed dates of the Bathing Season. Following analysis of responses, the Government response to the consultation will set out the next steps of this work, including any amendments.

■ **Weather: Armed Forces**

Dr Neil Hudson: [\[16266\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions his Department has had with the Ministry of Defence on the potential merits of using the Armed Forces during extreme weather events.

Emma Hardy:

Defra has longstanding arrangements with the Ministry of Defence to secure military support for flood response when this is required.

There are well practiced procedures for requesting Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) at national and local levels.

■ Weather: Power Failures

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[16271\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero and (b) energy companies on resilience capability in the event of instances of power cuts during extreme weather events.

Emma Hardy:

The Secretary of State has regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues, and Cabinet discussions are considered confidential.

The Government works closely with electricity networks to continually improve and maintain the resilience of energy infrastructure. In the event of a disruption, electricity network operators have well practiced response plans in place to minimise any disruption to customers, as far as possible.

■ Wildlife: Rodenticides

Alex Mayer:

[\[15945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to enhance monitoring of wildlife exposure to (a) rodenticides and (b) other toxic substances; and whether he plans to allocate additional resources to improve (i) reporting and (ii) response mechanisms in relation to wildlife affected by those substances.

Mary Creagh:

The UK Government is investing in enhancing England's capability to monitor for and report on exposure to wildlife of: anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs); legacy contaminants such as metals; and persistent bio-accumulative and toxic chemicals. This has been partly achieved through funding of the "interim H4: Exposure and Adverse Effects of Chemicals on Wildlife in the Environment" indicator under the 25 Year Environment Plan, and Environment Improvement Plan.

From a terrestrial perspective, Natural England is a partner and co-funder of the Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme (PBMS), hosted at the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. Through collaboration with PBMS, Natural England has delivered an annual report on Red Kite exposure to SGARs. Through work with other partners, it has been developing and expanding its work to monitor exposure and adverse effects of chemicals in the terrestrial environment.

Defra also provides funding for England's Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme which determines the underlying cause of death in wildlife where approved use, misuse or illegal use of pesticides or rodenticides is suspected; and the National Wildlife Crime Unit which helps prevent and detect wildlife crimes involving illegal use of such substances.

In each case, budgets for 2025-2026 and beyond have not yet been set.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ China and Hong Kong: Official Visits****Jim Shannon:**[\[15767\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will suspend all visits from (a) Chinese and (b) Hong Kong officials whilst hon. Members are sanctioned by the Chinese Government.

Catherine West:

China's retaliatory sanctions, including against Parliamentarians, are unwarranted and unacceptable. They are incomparable to the sanctions announced by the UK in 2021, which were based on compelling and widespread evidence of serious and systematic human rights violations in Xinjiang. This Government consistently raises the issue of UK Parliamentarians sanctioned by China. The Foreign Secretary has called on China to lift its sanctions including against Parliamentarians at every meeting he has had with his counterpart.

The Government believes that it should engage with China where there are clear UK and global interests. There are currently no plans to suspend all visits from Chinese and Hong Kong officials in relation to sanctions against Parliamentarians.

■ China and Philippines: Patrol Craft**Jim Shannon:**[\[15731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of reported clashes between Chinese and Philippine patrol vessels.

Catherine West:

In the South China Sea, we are committed to international law, the primacy of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and to freedom of navigation and overflight. We oppose any action that raises tensions or the risk of miscalculation and take no sides in the sovereignty disputes. We encourage all parties to settle their disputes peacefully through the existing legal mechanisms, particularly UNCLOS. During the Foreign Secretary's recent visit to China, he raised the importance of sustained dialogue on issues of mutual concern, and the UK's interests in regional peace and stability.

■ China: Foreign Relations**Sarah Champion:**[\[16150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with which Cabinet colleagues he has had discussions as part of the China audit.

Catherine West:

The UK Government is carrying out an audit to examine the UK's interests with respect to China to improve our ability to understand and respond to the challenges

and opportunities China poses. The audit is being conducted as a cross-government exercise, led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The Foreign Secretary has discussed the China audit with Ministerial colleagues representing the full range of the Government's interests, and the FCDO will continue engaging with all relevant government departments.

Calum Miller:

[\[16405\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans to publish the audit of the UK's partnership with China as a bilateral and global actor.

Catherine West:

The audit will examine the UK's interests with respect to China. This will improve our ability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses. The audit is due to conclude in early 2025 and we will update Parliament once the audit has concluded.

■ **Ghana: Treaties**

Shaun Davies:

[\[15510\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what records his Department holds on whether the Protectorate Treaty ceding Akwamu to the Gold Coast Colony, signed on 27 July 1886, was ratified.

Anneliese Dodds:

According to our records, the sole treaty signed on this date was the Arrangement between Great Britain and Germany, supplementary to the Arrangement of April-June 1885, relative to the respective Spheres of Action of the two Countries in the Gulf of Guinea, signed at London on 27 July 1886 and 2 August 1886. It is described as having entered into force immediately, which is the later of the dates above, and ratification was not required.

■ **Hezbollah: UN Resolutions**

Danny Kruger:

[\[15255\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on Hezbollah's non-compliance with UN Resolution 1701.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The announcement of a ceasefire agreement to end hostilities between Israel and Lebanese Hizballah offers hope. The UK was the first G7 country to call for an immediate ceasefire in September and we have worked relentlessly since, with our allies and partners, to apply pressure to end this conflict. We strongly urge all parties to use this agreement to open a pathway to a lasting peace. A long-term political settlement, consistent with UN Security Council resolution 1701, is the only way to restore security and stability for the Lebanese and Israeli people. The UK will continue to support the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) essential

role in maintaining peace along the Blue Line and the Lebanese Armed Forces, as the only legitimate military force in Lebanon.

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have spoken to counterparts from Israel, Lebanon and the US in recent weeks. Any deliberate attack against UNIFIL contravenes International Humanitarian Law and UN Security Council Resolution 1701. UNIFIL plays an essential role in Southern Lebanon and all parties must ensure freedom of movement for UNIFIL personnel.

■ Human Rights

Calum Miller: [\[16404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans to publish the Human Rights and Democracy Report 2023.

Anneliese Dodds:

This Government is firmly committed to the protection and promotion of human rights around the world, and to reporting publicly on its actions. The FCDO's 2023 Annual Human Rights and Democracy report has been delayed due to the change of Government.

■ Jimmy Lai

Jim Shannon: [\[16148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make it his policy to call for the immediate release of Jimmy Lai from solitary confinement.

Catherine West:

British national Jimmy Lai's case is a priority for the UK Government, and we are closely monitoring his trial. The Foreign Secretary has been consistent in raising Jimmy Lai's case with counterparts in the Chinese Government, including during his meeting with China's Foreign Minister in Beijing on 18 October. The Minister for Indo-Pacific also raised Lai's case with the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities when she visited Hong Kong on 14-15 November.

The UK Government has consistently called for Jimmy Lai's release and raised concerns about his case directly with the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities.

■ Kashmir: Human Rights

Sarah Owen: [\[16808\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Catherine West:

We recognise that there are human rights concerns in both India-administered-Kashmir and Pakistan-administered-Kashmir. We encourage all states to ensure

domestic laws are in line with international standards. Any allegation of human rights violations or abuse is deeply concerning and must be investigated thoroughly and transparently.

■ **Russia: Freezing of Assets**

Alex Sobel:

[15833]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of transferring frozen Russian assets held in the UK to support the underwriting of insurance for Ukrainian projects.

Stephen Doughty:

This Government is clear that Russia must be held responsible for its illegal war. That includes its obligations under international law to pay for the damage it has caused in Ukraine. Working with allies, we continue to pursue all possible lawful further avenues by which Russia can be made to meet those obligations. Our agreement with G7 partners to provide approximately \$50 billion in additional funding to Ukraine, repaid by the profits generated on sanctioned Russian sovereign assets, is an important step towards ensuring Russia pays. Our focus is on delivering this commitment, including the UK's £2.26 billion contribution, as soon as possible.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ **Accident and Emergency Departments: Standards**

Dr Al Pinkerton:

[16443]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of reduced access to GP services on waiting times in Accident and Emergency departments.

Karin Smyth:

The Department recognises that where the capacity of general practice (GP) services is not meeting patient demand, this can lead to some patients seeking advice and care in alternative settings, such as accident and emergency. We have already committed to recruiting over 1,000 newly qualified GPs from this October through an £82 million boost to the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme, increasing capacity in GPs. The latest information on accident and emergency waiting times is published monthly by NHS England, and is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/ae-waiting-times-and-activity/ae-attendances-and-emergency-admissions-2024-25/>

■ **Asylum: Children**

Rupert Lowe:

[16676]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average height is of male asylum seekers recorded via the National Child Measurement Programme.

Andrew Gwynne:

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

Data on asylum seeker status is not collected in the NCMP. Data on average height of male asylum seekers in England is not available. The height data for boys is measured in the NCMP. The following table shows the average height of boys aged five and 11 years old in the academic year 2023 to 2024:

AGE IN YEARS	ACADEMIC YEAR	SEX	MEAN HEIGHT
5	2023 to 2024	Boys	110.3cm
11	2023 to 2024	Boys	146.4cm

■ Blood Cancer: Medical Treatments

Luke Taylor:[\[16330\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure UK blood cancer patients can access effective new therapies that are available to patients overseas but have been subject to NICE terminated appraisals.

Karin Smyth:

Decisions on whether new medicines should be routinely funded by the National Health Service in England are made on the basis of recommendations from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), following an evaluation of a treatment's costs and benefits.

The NICE process relies on the company to make an evidence submission. When the company does not make an evidence submission, the NICE is unable to develop recommendations, and the appraisal is terminated. NHS England's default position is not to routinely commission a treatment where the company has not engaged in the NICE appraisal process. This is to avoid a potential pathway for circumventing the NICE process, that ensures value for the taxpayer.

The Government encourages all companies to engage constructively in the NICE appraisal process. The NICE is able to recommend most medicines for use in the NHS where companies engage in the process, and has recommended 79% of cancer medicines that it has appraised. This includes many medicines for blood cancers, that are now available to NHS patients, including through the Cancer Drugs Fund, which makes promising new medicines available to patients while further evidence is collected to address uncertainties in clinical and cost-effectiveness.

■ Carbon Monoxide: Alarms

Julia Buckley: [\[14532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of removing the exemption of care homes from the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 on public health.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have no current plans to assess the impact of removing this exemption. The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015, later amended by the Carbon Monoxide Regulations 2022, are for rented residential premises in England. The regulations exclude a range of settings, including care homes.

■ Care Homes: Employers' Contributions

Sir John Hayes: [\[14578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the impact of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions on care homes.

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. No specific assessment has been made on the impact of an increase to employer National Insurance contributions on care home providers.

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.

■ Care Homes: Evictions

Tom Hayes: [\[16055\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of evictions from care homes on vulnerable people in need of care.

Tom Hayes: [\[16056\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the powers of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman on decision making around evictions from care homes.

Tom Hayes: [\[16057\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to prevent care homes from evicting vulnerable residents.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 2 December 2024]: Local authorities should have appropriate plans in place to minimise any disruption of services if a provider exits the market. They are in the best position to find a local solution, with the minimum possible disruption, that meets people's needs and choices. Their priority will be residents and their families during what can be a difficult time.

Guidance on complying with the Consumer Protection Act issued by the Competition and Markets Authority clearly states that the resident, their representatives, and any other relevant independent professional should be consulted, and that eviction should only occur after efforts have been made to meet the resident's care needs. The reasons for the consultation should be fully discussed, together with possible solutions, before any final decision is made on the resident's continued stay in the care home.

Clauses about evictions should be clearly set out in the contracts that residents sign on entering the care homes. The legal minimum notice period is 28 days. This is set out in the Protection from Eviction Act 1977.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the independent complaints lead and works closely with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), sharing information with the CQC to identify poor practice.

■ Children: Medical Treatments**Dame Caroline Dinéage:**[\[16134\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve treatment pathways for (a) PANS and (b) PANDAS patients.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department recognises the importance of raising awareness of rare diseases such as paediatric acute-onset neuropsychiatric syndrome (PANS) and paediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections (PANDAS) among healthcare professionals and improving the health and care system for people living with such conditions.

We are supportive of the progress made by PANS PANDAS UK and the PANS PANDAS Steering Group to undertake a national surveillance study, develop a clinical guideline and produce guidance for professionals, children, young people and families.

■ Civil Society and General Practitioners: Finance**Tom Hayes:**[\[16052\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to financially support (a) GP practices and (b) third-sector organisations delivering commissioned services with employer National Insurance contributions from April 2025.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 2 December 2024]: 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 from April 2025, and the Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year at the earliest opportunity, including through NHS Planning Guidance, and the usual consultations, for instance the general practice contract.

■ Civil Society and Primary Health Care: Finance**Tom Hayes:**[\[16053\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will take steps to reallocate funding from acute care to (a) primary care and (b) the third-sector.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 2 December 2024]: In spring, we will publish a 10-Year Health Plan, which will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed, to move healthcare from hospitals to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention. This is a long-term challenge and will take time to deliver, and so the plan will consider both what immediate actions are needed to get the National Health Service back on its feet and bring waiting lists down, as well as the longer-term changes needed to make the health service fit for the future.

■ Dental Services: Undocumented Migrants**Rupert Lowe:**[\[15597\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many dentist appointments were attended by irregular migrants in each year since 2018.

Stephen Kinnock:

We do not hold data on how many dental appointments were attended by irregular migrants each year since 2018. Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for assessing the needs of their population and ensuring that the relevant dental services are available.

■ General Practitioners: Contracts**Paulette Hamilton:**[\[16540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to (a) include spirometry and FeNO testing in the GP contract and (b) to provide dedicated funding through a Directed Enhanced Service.

Stephen Kinnock:

Currently there are no plans to include spirometry and FeNO testing in the GP contract. In many areas, spirometry and FeNO testing services are delivered through

Local Enhanced Services (LESs), which are funded separately to global sum payments.

Integrated care boards, as commissioners of primary care, are responsible for commissioning LESs which practices can opt into, which vary in scope and funding to fit the needs of local areas. In areas where spirometry and FeNO testing are not commissioned through a LES, it is the commissioner's responsibility to ensure these services are available to patients.

■ General Practitioners: Prescriptions

Nesil Caliskan: [\[16698\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the timeframe GPs have to authorise repeat prescriptions.

Stephen Kinnock:

There is no set timeframe for which general practitioners (GPs) must authorise repeat prescriptions. However, GPs should ensure that their patients know when to request the next batch of their repeat prescriptions, to allow sufficient time for it to be authorised and dispensed.

Under the GP Contract, practices in England are able to transfer any clinically appropriate patients onto Electronic Repeat Dispensing if they are already receiving, or have agreed to receive electronic prescriptions. This means, for patients who regularly receive the same medicine, GPs can issue up to 12 months' worth of regular prescriptions without the patient needing to visit their GP. Instead, the prescription can be sent straight to their pharmacist for dispensing.

GPs are also required to offer patients the ability to order repeat prescriptions for drugs, medicines, and appliances online.

■ General Practitioners: Private Sector

Mike Martin: [\[16587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many private GP surgeries there are in (a) England, (b) Kent and (c) Tunbridge Wells constituency.

Mike Martin: [\[16588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many private GP surgeries were set up in (a) England, (b) Kent and (c) Tunbridge Wells constituency in the last 12 months.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 2 December 2024]: Data on the number of private general practice (GP) surgeries is not held centrally. The majority of GPs operate under the GP Contract, to provide National Health Service GP services. Private GP surgeries must be registered with the Care Quality Commission, and doctors must be registered with the General Medical Council.

■ General Practitioners: Translation Services

Rupert Lowe: [\[15618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 14197 on General Practitioners: Translation Services, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of collecting data on the cost of translation and interpretation services incurred by GPs.

Rupert Lowe: [\[15619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November to Question 14376 on Health Services: Translation Services, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of collecting data on the number of (a) GP and (b) outpatient appointments conducted in a language other than English and British Sign Language.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has not made, and has no plans to make, an assessment of the potential merits of collecting data on the cost of translation and interpretation services incurred by general practices (GPs).

The Department has also not made, and has no plans to make, an assessment of the potential merits of collecting data on the number of GP and outpatient appointments conducted in a language other than English and British Sign Language.

■ General Practitioners: Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe: [\[15596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many GP appointments were attended by irregular migrants in each year since 2018.

Stephen Kinnock:

Primary care services delivered by general practitioners and nurses are free for all in England. Therefore, the migration status of individuals is not recorded, as it is not relevant to the care provided, or in relation to cost recovery.

■ Health Services: Gender Recognition

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[8215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of gender-neutral language in (a) pregnancy services and (b) other sex-specific areas of healthcare on the standard of health care services provided to patients.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 15 October 2024]: There are no plans to make an assessment. The Government is clear that it expects health services to be delivered in line with the Equality Act 2010.

■ Health Services: Women

Sarah Champion: [\[15776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the 10 Year Health Plan will help tackle specific health challenges faced by women; and whether gender-specific health interventions such as menstruation will be included in its long-term goals.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is committed to prioritising women's health as we reform the National Health Service, and women's equality will be at the heart of our missions. We are considering how to take forward the Women's Health Strategy, by aligning it to the Government's missions and forthcoming 10-Year Health Plan.

The 10-Year Plan will ensure a better health service for everyone, regardless of condition or service area. We will carefully be considering policies with input from the public, patients, health and care staff, and our partners as we develop the plan.

■ Mental Health Services: Children and Young People

Ian Sollom: [\[15867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress he has made on ensuring that children and young people in every community have access to drop in mental health support.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government is committed to improving mental health support for children and young people. Our commitment to roll out a network of Young Futures Hubs in every community to provide open access mental health support is proof of this.

We are currently working across Government to consider options in order to deliver Young Futures Hubs. The hubs will bring together services, including mental health support, to improve how young people access opportunities and support at the community level.

■ Mental Health Services: Standards

Paula Barker: [\[15865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that mental health patients who could pose a risk to the wider public have their cases managed appropriately.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 2 December 2024]: The Mental Health Act 1983, now and when reformed, has the necessary powers to enable clinicians to manage high risk mental health patients. The planned reforms will not change the fundamental powers and purpose of the Act, which is to detain and treat people when they are so unwell they become a risk to themselves or others. However, when the very serious decision is taken to detain someone, the reforms will ensure there is a modern framework for the

use of these powers, to ensure patients are treated with dignity and respect and that they receive care and treatment which supports recovery.

The Mental Health Bill will seek to improve the management of risk within the Act. This Government has made additional changes to the bill published in draft in 2022 to achieve this, including the introduction of a new requirement for the patient's responsible clinician to consult another person who has been professionally concerned with the patient's care when they are deciding about whether to discharge a patient.

NHS England included a requirement in the 2024/25 NHS Priorities and Operational Planning Guidance that all integrated care boards (ICBs) "review their community services by Q2 2024/25 to ensure that they have clear policies and practice in place for patients with serious mental illness, who require intensive community treatment and follow-up but where engagement is a challenge".

The outcome of these reviews and local action plans will be presented at ICB's public boards to ensure the outcome of the review is transparent and locally led.

■ **NHS: Lincolnshire**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[16123\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase (a) recruitment and (b) retention of NHS staff in (i) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (ii) Lincolnshire.

Karin Smyth:

This information is not collected centrally. National Health Service organisations are responsible for their own recruitment and develop their own workforce plans based on service needs. At a national level, we are committed to training the staff the NHS needs, and will work closely with partners in education to do this.

NHS England continues to lead on a range of initiatives to boost the retention of existing staff and to ensure that the NHS remains an attractive career choice for new recruits. This includes a strong focus on improving organisational culture, supporting staff wellbeing, and promoting flexible working opportunities. It is continually reviewing the effectiveness of these, and their impact on the workforce.

■ **NHS: Translation Services**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[14506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what information his Department holds on the number of full-time translation and interpretation staff working in the NHS; what externally-provided translation and interpretation services are available in the NHS; and if he will publish (a) a list of the providers and (b) the cost to the public purse for those services.

Karin Smyth:

The Department is unable to provide a response about the number of full-time translation and interpretation staff working in the National Health Service, because the data is not held centrally. Information on the externally provided translation and interpretation services used by the NHS, as well as the list of providers they used, can be found in the following provider frameworks:

¾ the Crown Commercial Service, with further information available at the following link: <https://www.crowncommercial.gov.uk/agreements/RM6141> ;

¾ the ESPO Language Services, with further information available at the following link: <https://www.espo.org/language-services-402-24.html> ;

¾ the NHS London Procurement Partnership Language Services Framework, with further information available at the following link: <https://www.lpp.nhs.uk/categories/estates-facilities-corporate-services/language-services-framework/> ; and

¾ the NHS Shared Business Services Interpretation and Translation Services Framework, with further information available at the following link: <https://www.sbs.nhs.uk/services/framework-agreements/interpretation-and-translation-services/>.

Information on the amount spent under each of these frameworks is not held centrally.

Rupert Lowe: [\[16684\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the average additional time taken during the appointments for (a) translation and (b) interpretation.

Rupert Lowe: [\[16687\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of letters posted by the NHS were in each language in each of the last five years; and what the cost of translation was for those letters.

Rupert Lowe: [\[16689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which interpreting agencies are contracted to provide services to the NHS; and what the cost to the public purse of those contracts is.

Rupert Lowe: [\[16691\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many test results have been translated into languages other than English for each of the last five years.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold the requested information centrally. Integrated care boards are responsible for arranging National Health Service healthcare services to meet the needs of their respective populations, which includes translation services.

The Department has no plans to estimate the average additional time taken during appointments for translation and interpretation.

The Department also has no plans to collect information on the proportion and cost of letters posted by the NHS in each language over the last five years, for which interpreting agencies are contracted to provide services to the NHS, the cost of such contracts, or how many test results have been translated into languages other than English for each of the last five years.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 15631 on NHS: Translation services, which languages e-RS letters sent in 2024-25 were translated into.

Karin Smyth:

Please see the list below which outlines the languages which e-Referral Service letters sent in 2024/25 were translated into:

- ARABIC; - BENGALI; - GUJARATI; - KURDISH; -
PERSIAN; - POLISH; - PUNJABI; - SOMALI; -
TURKISH; - URDU; - ALBANIAN; - CHINESE; -
FRENCH; - GREEK; - HINDI; - HUNGARIAN; -
ITALIAN; - LITHUANIAN; - PORTUGUESE; -
ROMANIAN; - RUSSIAN; - SLOVAK; - SPANISH; -
TAMIL; AND - WOLOF.

■ Ophthalmic Services: Special Educational Needs

Danny Beales:

[\[15564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many children are in receipt of the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service.

Danny Beales:

[\[15565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many children in receipt of the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service have had (a) a need for glasses, (b) another sight problem, (c) no previous known history of eye care and (d) a history of hospital-based eye care since its commencement.

Stephen Kinnock:

NHS England have piloted sight testing and the dispensing of glasses in special schools since 2021. Between April 2021 and August 2024 a total of 23,832 sight tests were provided.

There were a total of 9,909 pairs of glasses issued between April 2021 and August 2024 as part of the service. Between April 2021 and March 2024, 859 sight tests were recorded with another sight problem identified, 14,048 sight tests were recorded where there was either no previous history or previous history was unknown and

6,083 sight tests were recorded where there was a history of hospital-based eye care.

The legislation that will underpin the roll out of this service across the country was laid on 28 November 2024.

■ Parkinson's Disease: Health Services

Sarah Green: [\[16559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department currently holds on waiting lists for treatment for Parkinson's Disease in England.

Sarah Green: [\[16560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the number of specialist Parkinson's Nurses required to meet the current needs of patients.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Department does not hold data specifically on the number of people waiting for treatment for Parkinson's disease in England. The Department does hold data on waiting times for neurology, but not broken down by specific conditions. The latest data for referral to treatment waiting times in England, from September 2024, shows there were over 234,000 patients waiting for a neurology appointment, and that 54% of patients were seen by a neurologist within 18 weeks.

There are a number of initiatives supporting service improvement and better care for patients with Parkinson's disease in England, including the Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) Programme for Neurology, the RightCare Progressive Neurological Conditions Toolkit, and the Neurology Transformation Programme (NTP).

The GIRFT National Specialty Report made recommendations designed to improve services nationally, and to support the National Health Service to deliver care more equitably across the country. The report highlighted differences in how services are delivered, and provided the opportunity to share successful initiatives between trusts to improve patient services nationally. In addition, the NTP has developed a model of integrated care for neurology services to support integrated care boards to deliver the right service, at the right time for all neurology patients, including providing care closer to home.

Once diagnosed, and with a management strategy in place, the majority of people with Parkinson's can be cared for through routine access to primary and secondary care. NHS England commissions the specialised elements of Parkinson's care that patients may receive from 27 neurology centres across England. Within specialised centres, neurological multidisciplinary teams ensure patients can access a range of health professionals, including Parkinson's disease nurses, psychologists, and allied health professionals such as dieticians and speech and language therapists, and that they can receive specialised treatment and support according to their needs.

No specific assessment has been made of the number of specialist Parkinson's nurses required to meet the current need of patients in England. While the Department does not hold data specifically on the number of Parkinson's specialist staff in England, we do hold data on the numbers working in the wider speciality of neurology. As of July 2024, there were over 1,800 full-time equivalent (FTE) doctors working in the specialty of neurology in NHS trusts and other organisations in England. This includes over 900 FTE consultant neurologists. In 2023, the fill rate for recruitment into the specialty of neurology in England was 94%.

The NHS workforce has been overworked for years, leading to staff becoming burnt out and demoralised. We must be honest about the challenges we are facing. The NHS is broken but not beaten and together we will turn it around.

We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed to move healthcare from hospital to the community, from analogue to digital, and from treatment to prevention.

A central and core part of the 10-Year Health Plan will be our workforce and how we ensure we train and provide the staff, technology, and infrastructure the NHS needs to care for patients across our communities.

■ Pharmacy

Chris Hinchliff:

[\[16446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the report entitled Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2024: Funding and Profitability Report, published on 19 October 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

As noted in the review by Lord Darzi, primary care is under pressure and in crisis. The Government recognises that pharmacies are an integral part of the fabric of our communities, as an easily accessible front door to the National Health Service, staffed by highly trained and skilled healthcare professionals. Unfortunately, we inherited a system that has been neglected for too long and is no longer supporting the pharmacists we need to deliver for patients at a local level. I am committed to working with the sector, and would encourage all pharmacists to work with us to achieve what we all want, a service fit for the future.

Now that the Budget for the Government has been set, we will shortly be resuming our consultation with Community Pharmacy England regarding funding arrangements. I am unable to say more until these have been concluded.

Chris Hinchliff:

[\[16447\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of increasing the range of conditions that can be treated under the Pharmacy First service.

Stephen Kinnock:

Pharmacy professionals are highly skilled clinicians who are experts in the use and management of medicines. The Pharmacy First Service, alongside other services that enable quicker and more convenient access to medicines, where it is safe to do so, supports patients in realising the maximum benefit from the medicines prescribed by their general practitioners.

In considering the services that we commission, on a national basis, we carefully consider their deliverability, including whether they are deliverable in the current estate, and any necessary IT and referral processes that need to be put in place to ensure patient safety. The cost effectiveness of providing services in community pharmacy compared to providing them in other settings is also considered. All services are kept under review.

NHS England is currently running over 200 pathfinder programmes, examining different governance and delivery models to understand how prescribing services could be commissioned from community pharmacy. This will help inform the future expansion in community pharmacy services, including Pharmacy First, over the coming years.

■ Pharmacy: Community Health Services**Mr Lee Dillon:****[15083]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support the Pharmacy First campaign.

Stephen Kinnock:

There is a targeted public communications campaign with associated media materials, running from 11 November 2024 until mid-December 2024 as well as coordinated communications across the healthcare system and sharing best practices where the service is already working well.

Action is also being taken to drive further engagement and referrals from general practice, with targeted engagement through regional and integrated care board (ICB) channels and regular data to support managing performance. In addition to this, funding has been provided to ICBs to recruit primary care network engagement leads who will be well placed to support practice teams to refer into the service.

Additionally, NHS England is improving digital systems to make the referral process better integrated, including further development of electronic referral systems. Most pharmacies can now also receive Pharmacy First referrals from general practitioners straight into their NHS England assured pharmacy IT systems.

■ Pharmacy: Staff**Rebecca Paul:****[16371]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will introduce regulations to ensure that a pharmacist is always present in an open pharmacy to facilitate the sale of pharmacy medicines,

Stephen Kinnock:

Pharmacy regulations already require that a registered pharmacy business can only operate and be open to the public, to sell or supply prescription only medicines or pharmacy medicines, when a responsible pharmacist, the pharmacist legally responsible for the safe and effective running of an individual pharmacy, is signed in. The regulations stipulate that the responsible pharmacist may be absent from the pharmacy for a maximum of two hours during the pharmacy business hours, for example to have a meeting with a general practice, attend training, or to have a lunch or a rest break. The sale of general sales list medicines, such as some aspirin and paracetamol products, may continue in the absence of the responsible pharmacist.

Case law and professional guidance dictates that the final sale or supply of prescription only medicines and pharmacy medicines requires a pharmacist to be on the registered premise, and either directly aware of the transactions or interruptible, so as to be able to intervene in a sale or supply.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Birmingham**Paulette Hamilton:**[\[16639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to tackle rates of respiratory-related hospital admissions in Birmingham.

Andrew Gwynne:

System partners are working collaboratively to improve pathways between health care professionals, and to remove barriers in referrals to community-based services and hospital acute setting clinics. This will support admission avoidance, and ensure that patients are receiving the right care in the right place, more quickly.

An example of this is the work between the West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust (WMAS) and urgent community response, who are supporting the WMAS with direct referrals into their service, and providing a call before you convey the telephone line for ambulance clinicians on the scene with patients. Increasing the workforce skill mix in the urgent community response to support with decision making will avoid admissions. Support to care homes to ensure they can safely monitor and escalate, where patients become unwell, to appropriate health care professionals has been supported by urgent community response teams and virtual ward teams. We are also improving respiratory virtual ward utilisation in collaboration with both the University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust and the Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

Paulette Hamilton:[\[16640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) Birmingham Erdington constituency and (b) other areas covered by the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board to address the barriers to respiratory diagnostics identified in the report entitled Right Test Right Time, published by Asthma and Lung UK in August 2023.

Andrew Gwynne:

In addition to the development of community diagnostic provision, on Monday 4 November the Birmingham Solihull Integrated Care Board (ICB) launched a system-wide campaign to encourage people to 'breathe easy' by getting their vaccines. Focusing primarily on flu, COVID-19, and the respiratory syncytial virus, the Breathe Easy campaign was designed to engage with people who are over 65 years old and living in the postcodes where it is known that vaccine uptake is low, as well as those who are aged six months to 64 years old and who have an increased risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19 because of a health condition or treatment. The ICB is also urging pregnant women who are between 28 and 32 weeks of their pregnancy to ensure they are doing all they can to protect themselves and their unborn baby.

Radio, bus stop, bus interior, community radio, billboard, online, and supermarket adverts are all currently live, and will run until Christmas 2024. This campaign forms part of the integrated care system's winter communications plan, which has been developed to bring partners together across the system to help create a movement asking people to take personal responsibility, drive action, increase trust in community health services, and educate, to prevent ill-health and ultimately protect the health of yourself, others, and the local National Health Service.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Diagnosis**Paulette Hamilton:**[\[16637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the capacity of secondary care to support primary care with essential respiratory diagnostics.

Andrew Gwynne:

Following a significant drop in the volume of spirometry during the pandemic, NHS England has already worked with a range of partners, including Asthma and Lung UK, the British Thoracic Society, the Association of Respiratory Technology and Physiology, and clinical leads to develop a package for systems containing the information and support required to help increase the number of people receiving early and accurate diagnosis for respiratory disease.

NHS England's priorities and operational planning guidance for 2024/25 also highlights the importance of timely access to diagnostics, including spirometry, asking systems to utilise new diagnostic capacity in the community to commission these tests. Additional funding has been made available to systems in 2021/22, 2022/23, and 2023/24 for the training and accreditation of staff in the provision and interpretation of quality assured spirometry, a key component of an early and accurate diagnosis. In 2023/24 and 2024/25, the national team is financially supporting systems to take innovative approaches to expanding access to their diagnostic services, focusing particularly on addressing health inequalities.

■ Respiratory Diseases: Screening

Paulette Hamilton:

[16636]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure spirometry testing is (a) funded and (b) available in areas covered by the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board.

Andrew Gwynne:

Spirometry testing is provided at the Washwood Heath Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC), along with other respiratory diagnostic tests such as fractional exhaled nitric oxide and lung function tests. The same tests will also be available at the North Solihull and South Birmingham CDCs when they go live next year. Mobilisation meetings are underway with the provider to establish that these services are ready to go live.

All tests and funding seen in the CDC have a tariff attached to them, which incentivises systems to develop diagnostic pathways, including for respiratory health, that take place in the community. These tests are local, accessible, and offer timely appointments. There are now three CDCs approved in Birmingham and Solihull, which shows a system shift to a community-based delivery model for all diagnostics, and spirometry testing is key to diagnosis a number of conditions affecting a large number of the local population.

■ Royal Berkshire Hospital

Clive Jones:

[R] [16310]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress he has made on the New Hospital Programme Review in relation to the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

Karin Smyth:

The Royal Berkshire 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, which will include a new and realistic delivery schedule for the programme, at the earliest opportunity.

■ Smoking: Health Services

Mr Paul Kohler:

[16837]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is taking steps to help ensure that local stop smoking services offer the option of a National Institute for Health and Care Excellence-approved non-pharmaceutical method to help smokers quit.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is providing local stop smoking services an additional £70 million this year to support smokers to quit. It will also provide an additional £70 million next year for stop smoking services.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has published recommendations for providers of stop smoking services. The guidelines suggest that the most effective way of successfully stopping smoking is through behavioural support therapy combined with either varenicline, nicotine replacement therapy, or nicotine-containing e-cigarettes. Further information on the NICE's recommendations for providers of stop smoking services is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng209/chapter/Recommendations-on-treating-tobacco-dependence#stop-smoking-interventions>

Local stop smoking services currently offer the option of non-pharmaceutical methods to help smokers quit, alongside behavioural support. According to the 2023/24 annual Statistics on NHS Stop Smoking Services in England, 20,641, or 11%, of those accessing services and setting a quit date used no pharmaceutical products in their attempt to quit smoking.

■ Smoking: Northern Ireland

Sorcha Eastwood:

[15880]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Executive on supporting smokers in Northern Ireland to quit.

Andrew Gwynne:

The landmark Tobacco and Vapes Bill was introduced into Parliament on 5 November 2024 and will be the single biggest public health intervention since the Government banned smoking in indoor public spaces.

This bill goes further than ever before. It will create the first smoke-free generation, gradually phasing out the sale of tobacco products across the country, enable the Government to strengthen the existing ban on smoking in public places, to reduce the harms of passive smoking in certain outdoor settings, ban vapes and nicotine products from being promoted and advertised to children, and introduce tougher enforcement measures, including through providing powers to introduce a retail licensing scheme for tobacco and vapes.

The bill has been developed in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Government. The Department has engaged extensively with all the devolved administrations throughout the process of drafting the bill. I also have liaised directly with Minister Nesbitt and his department's officials on the bill's contents and progress, and will continue to do so..

Stop smoking services and support for smokers to quit are devolved matters, and support for smokers to quit in Northern Ireland is for the Northern Ireland Executive to determine.

■ Social Services and Health Services: Employers' Contributions

Wera Hobhouse: [\[14688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes to National Insurance contributions in the Autumn Budget 2024 on (a) social care and (b) NHS services.

Stephen Kinnock:

We have taken tough decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget. 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. The Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year in due course, including through NHS Planning Guidance and the usual consultations.

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.

■ Vorasidenib

Victoria Collins: [\[16008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to carry out Vorasidenib trials on patients that have undergone (a) radiotherapy and (b) chemotherapy.

Andrew Gwynne:

Research is crucial in tackling brain cancer, which is why the Department spends £1.5 billion each year on research through its research delivery arm, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), with cancer as one of the largest areas of investment, at over £121.8 million in 2022/23, reflecting its high priority.

The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including clinical trials for brain cancer treatments. Applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money, and scientific quality.

The Department aims to ensure that all patients, including those with brain tumours, have access to cutting-edge clinical research and innovative, lifesaving treatments. In order to maximise our potential to be a world leader and develop a more competitive, efficient, and accessible clinical research system, the Department is committed to rapidly implementing recommendations from the Lord O'Shaughnessy independent

review of commercial clinical trials, and going further in our support for the forthcoming 10-Year Health Plan.

HOME OFFICE

■ Anti-social Behaviour: Rural Areas

Samantha Niblett:

[\[16305\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help reduce the incidence of antisocial behaviour in rural areas.

Dame Diana Johnson:

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

The Government recently announced Respect Orders, which will be introduced in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill. Respect Orders can be applied for by police and local councils and are issued by the courts.

They will enable courts to place wide-ranging restrictions on the behaviour of the most persistent and disruptive ASB offenders. They will include a power of arrest for any suspected breach, meaning officers can take action quickly to disrupt ongoing ASB. Breach will be a criminal offence, which is heard in the criminal courts with a wide range of sentencing options, including community orders, unlimited fines and, for the most severe cases, up to two years' imprisonment.

We will also put thousands of new neighbourhood police and community support officers into local communities, so residents know who to turn to when things go wrong.

■ Cars: Digital Technology

Sarah Champion:

[\[15774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 24 October to Question 11004 on Cars: Digital Technology, what steps her Department is taking to tackle the misuse of digitally connected cars by domestic abusers.

Jess Phillips:

This Government has set out our ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, and that will include tackling domestic abuse in all its forms.

Digitally connected cars could risk the safety of women and girls if perpetrators can use them to track and control their victims. Technology-facilitated domestic abuse is a particularly insidious form of domestic abuse, and the Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Statutory Guidance references such behaviours.

We will go further than before to deliver a cross-government transformative approach to halve all forms of violence against women and girls, underpinned by a new VAWG

strategy to be published next year. This will include our approach to tackling technology-facilitated domestic abuse.

We are also clear that the industry must play their part in helping to prevent their technologies being used for harmful purposes through safer by design approaches. I would gladly meet with manufacturers to discuss these approaches further.

■ Crime: Retail Trade

Sir John Hayes:

[\[15721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to tackle retail crime in rural communities.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Shop theft continues to increase at an unacceptable level, up 29% on year up to June 2024, with more and more offenders using violence and abuse against shopworkers to do this. We won't stand for this.

As part of the Safer Streets Mission, we will introduce a new offence of assaulting a retail worker to protect the hardworking and dedicated staff that work in stores. We will also end the effective immunity granted to shop theft of goods under £200, and provide over £7 million over the next three financial years to support the police tackling retail crime.

These measures will apply to shop workers and retails in urban and rural communities, and this Government is clear that no matter where you live, when you report a crime, it should be properly investigated with victims having faith justice will be delivered, and criminals facing meaningful consequences

■ Dangerous Driving: Rural Areas

Blake Stephenson:

[\[15849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to help tackle dangerous driving in rural areas.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Any form of dangerous driving is a serious road safety issue. Dangerous driving is the offence of driving far below the standard that would be expected of a careful and competent driver. The maximum sentence for dangerous driving is an unlimited fine, disqualification and up to 14 years in prison.

How the police enforce road traffic legislation and investigate road traffic offences is an operational matter for the local chief officer, in conjunction with Police and Crime Commissioners.

■ Delivery Services: Crimes of Violence

Mrs Sarah Russell:

[\[16061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of reported incidents of violence against retail

workers employed in home delivery; and if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of this violence on the well being of those workers.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Shop theft continues to increase at an unacceptable level, up 29% on year up to June 2024, with more and more offenders using violence and abuse against shopworkers to do this.

Everybody has a right to feel safe on the job and this government is committed to taking retail crime seriously.

We will introduce a new specific offence for assaults on shopworkers to protect them from violence and abuse. The scope of the legislation is still under consideration and will be confirmed when legislation is brought forward.

■ **Dogs: Animal Experiments**

Victoria Collins: [\[16009\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to end the breeding of beagles used for laboratory experiments.

Dan Jarvis:

The Government is committed to supporting the uptake and development of alternative methods to the use of animals in science.

The Labour Manifesto for government includes a commitment to “partner with scientists, industry, and civil society as we work towards the phasing out of animal testing”, which is a long-term goal.

■ **Immigration Controls: Manchester Airport**

John McDonnell: [\[15634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what equality impact assessment has been made of the proposed changes to Border Force rosters at Manchester Airport from 1 April 2025.

John McDonnell: [\[15635\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions her Department has held with the PCS union over proposed changes to Border Force rosters at Manchester Airport from 1 April 2025.

John McDonnell: [\[15639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what redeployment options are available to Border Force staff who are potentially unable to work new rosters at Manchester Airport from 1 April 2025.

Seema Malhotra:

Manchester Airport Group are investing £1.3 Billion in infrastructure transformation at Manchester Airport. During 2025, the Airport will transition from being a three-

terminal operation to two terminals, and forecast passenger growth of 22% over the next two years.

As a consequence, Border Force have to reshape their operating model in line with the infrastructure changes. In addition, Border Force at Manchester Airport have seen the introduction of new rosters on an annual basis over several years.

The ambition is that all staff will be able to work the new roster. Anyone with a contractual workplace adjustment who is unable to work the roster will be given tailored individual support to secure suitable alternative roles.

The programme team have undertaken regular engagement with PCS and will continue to do so.

■ National Security

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis:

[\[16096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent progress her Department has made with the (a) Defending Democracy Taskforce and (b) Welsh Government on protecting all levels of democracy from harm.

Dan Jarvis:

It is vital that elected representatives and their staff can discharge their duties without threat of intimidation or assault. We have seen wholly unacceptable behaviour, especially during the general election.

The Defending Democracy Taskforce is looking urgently at these issues, and I will update the House further in due course.

The Taskforce also regularly engages with all devolved administrations including Wales, on tackling our shared threats including protective security. Officials will be holding their next meeting with devolved administrations following the next Taskforce due to be held in early 2025.

■ National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service

Rachel Taylor:

[\[15943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The National Vehicle Intelligence Service (NaVCIS) is a national policing unit funded by industry, including finance and leasing companies, insurers and hauliers, to provide dedicated specialist intelligence and enforcement.

We are providing £250,000 this financial year to help support enforcement at the ports to prevent stolen vehicles and vehicle parts being shipped abroad, including additional staff and specialist equipment.

■ Non-crime Hate Incidents**Sir John Hayes:** [\[15726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an estimate of the number of hours of police time spent each week on investigating non crime hate incidents.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not currently hold force-level data on the recording of non-crime hate incidents.

■ Sham Marriage**Sir John Hayes:** [\[15725\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to collect data on the number of applications to stay in the UK that are made on the basis of a sham (a) marriage and (b) civil partnership.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Government takes abuse of the spouse and partner immigration routes very seriously. Family migration must be based on a genuine and subsisting marriage or relationship. The Home Office focuses its efforts on disrupting facilitators as well as prosecuting individuals involved in sham marriages and civil partnerships.

The Home Office will also investigate if, at any point, there are reasonable suspicions of a sham relationship, for example following applications for permission to enter or stay, or where there is supporting intelligence or evidence gathered during operations.

The Home Office continues to enhance its reporting capabilities of recorded sham marriage data and is recording the number of sham marriage and civil partnership applications that it detects. However, it is not possible to state how many applications to stay are made on the basis of a sham marriage or civil partnership.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Age Assurance**Rupert Lowe:** [\[15860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will (a) introduce more thorough age assessments for irregular migrants and (b) reassess the age of all 16-17 year old irregular migrants in the UK.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Honourable member to the answer I gave on 22nd October to question UIN 9190.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Great Yarmouth

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many irregular migrants were arrested in Great Yarmouth constituency in each of the last five years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

This data is not held centrally, and could only be at disproportionate cost.

■ Vetting

Luke Murphy:

[\[15975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) standard, (b) enhanced, and (c) basic Disclosure and Barring Service checks in (i) Basingstoke constituency, (ii) Hampshire, and (iii) England have exceeded the police's target response times in each of the last three years.

Luke Murphy:

[\[15976\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) standard, (b) enhanced, and (c) basic Disclosure and Barring Service checks in (i) Basingstoke constituency, (ii) Hampshire, and (iii) England have taken over 100 days to complete in each of the last three years.

Luke Murphy:

[\[15977\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the average processing time for Disclosure and Barring Service checks in (a) Basingstoke constituency, (b) Hampshire, and (c) England in the last 12 months.

Jess Phillips:

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is operationally independent. Standard and Basic checks are not referred by the DBS to police forces. For Enhanced checks, application details may be referred to any police force that holds potentially relevant information and not just the police force where the applicant currently resides.

The DBS publishes its performance data for England and Wales on a quarterly basis. The most recently published performance data for the second quarter of 2024-25 which can be viewed at: DBS dataset 1: DBS checks, the DBS Update Service, and disputes - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), shows that the DBS achieved the following:

- The target to process 85% of Basic checks within 2 days was met, with an average attainment of 88.6%.
- The target to process 85% of Standard checks within 3 days was met, with an average attainment of 91.2%.
- The target to process 80% of Enhanced checks within 14 days was not met, with achievement continuing to be impacted by the closure of a higher percentage of aged cases at the police force stage.

The DBS does not publish data broken down by constituencies, towns, cities or counties.

■ Visas

Paula Barker:

[16300]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make a comparative assessment of the processing times for (a) parent, (b) spousal and (c) work visas.

Seema Malhotra:

Applications for parental, spouse and work visas are assessed against different immigration rules and as such, processing times are subject to the complexities of the individual routes.

The Home Office keeps visa processing times constantly under review and steps have been taken to reduce these across all visa routes where possible.

Information on visa processing times for applications made outside of the UK can be found here: [Visa processing times: applications outside the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visa-processing-times-applications-outside-uk).

Information on visa processing times for applications made from within the UK can be found here: [Visa processing times: applications inside the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visa-processing-times-applications-inside-uk).

■ Visas: Foreign Investment in UK

Calum Miller:

[16406]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to publish the findings of the review into the Tier 1 (Investor) visa route.

Seema Malhotra:

The Written Ministerial Statement of 12 January 2023, laid by the former Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP, provided the findings of the review into the Tier 1 (Investor) visa.

■ Visas: Married People

Sarah Hall:

[15969]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average processing time is for a spousal visa application.

Seema Malhotra:

An applicant applying for a family visa at entry clearance should get a decision within 12 weeks.

[Visa decision waiting times: applications outside the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visa-decision-waiting-times-applications-outside-uk)

An applicant applying in the UK to extend a family visa (spouse or partner on a 5-year route to settlement) should get a decision within 8 weeks.

[Visa decision waiting times: applications inside the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/visa-decision-waiting-times-applications-inside-uk)

An applicant applying in the UK for settlement should get a decision within 6 months.

[Visa decision waiting times: applications inside the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Average processing times do not form part of any current transparency data for spouse/partner applications but the transparency data does, however, include a range of processing data and the latest data can be found at: [Migration transparency data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk).

■ Visas: Parents

Paula Barker:

[16301]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to reduce the time taken to process visas for the parents of people living in the UK.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office keeps visa processing times under review, including on the routes available to parents. Different routes, and individual circumstances, involve varying levels of complexity but the Home Office is committed to improving process efficiency wherever possible.

Information on visa processing times for applications made outside of the UK can be found here: [Visa processing times: applications outside the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk).

Information on visa processing times for applications made from within the UK can be found here: [Visa processing times: applications inside the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk).

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Affordable Housing: Construction

Kevin Hollinrake:

[15760]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Statement of 28 October 2024 on Social and Affordable Housing: Next Steps, HCWS169, what the target date is for the 5,000 new homes to be (a) started and (b) completed.

Kevin Hollinrake:

[15761]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Statement of 28 October 2024 on Social and Affordable Housing: Next Steps, HCWS169, what the tenure mix will be for the 5,000 new social and affordable homes.

Matthew Pennycook:

At the Budget on 30 October, the Chancellor announced a one year top up of £500 million to the Affordable Homes Programme. This is expected to deliver up to 5,000

additional homes under the programme. The delivery of the additional homes will follow the targets and parameters of the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme.

I refer the Hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 30 July 2024 ([HCWS48](#)), which announced flexibilities for affordable housing delivery in London including allowing some homes to complete by March 2030.

The deadline for housing starts on site for the 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme is March 2026. The deadlines for completions can vary. For homes outside London, completion dates are set out in Homes England's guidance for applicants [here](#).

The tenure mix will depend on the bids from local authorities and housing associations, to be assessed by Homes England and the Greater London Authority, and I have asked those organisations to prioritise Social Rent homes with this extra funding.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Statement of 28 October 2024 on Social and Affordable Housing: Next Steps, HCWS169, if she will make an estimate of the (a) number of Right to Buy sales and (b) associated funding for replacement dwellings in each of the next four years.

Matthew Pennycook:

The [Review of the Increased Right to Buy Discounts introduced in 2012](#) includes figures on the impact of the new reduced maximum discounts.

We estimate that an average of 1,700 sales will take place annually which will generate, on average, approximately £250 million of net receipts every year.

Annex A of the Review outlines the assumptions about future sales and receipts on which the Right to Buy reforms are based.

As confirmed at Budget, the government is allowing councils to retain the full capital receipt generated by a Right to Buy sale to support the delivery of replacement dwellings.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information (a) her Department and (b) Homes England holds on the average grant awarded per unit for new (i) affordable and (ii) social rent dwellings in (A) England, (B) London and (C) England outside London under the Affordable Homes Programme 2021-26 to date.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information (a) her Department and (b) Homes England hold on the average grant awarded per unit for new affordable dwellings for homeownership in (A) England, (B) London and (C) England outside London under the Affordable Homes Programme 2021-26 to date.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15766\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what is the average grant awarded per unit for (a) London Living Rent and (b) London affordable rent under the Affordable Homes Programme 2021 to 2026.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15803\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the affordable housing grant funding rates are per unit in London under the Accelerated Funding Route by type of affordable housing tenure.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[16498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the average grant subsidy per unit to build an average affordable dwelling under the (a) social rent, (b) affordable rent and (c) affordable home ownership tenures was in the 2015-18 Affordable Homes Programme.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government delegates delivery of the government's Affordable Homes Programme to Homes England (outside London) and to the Greater London Authority (GLA) in London.

The government agrees budgets and targets with both agencies to deliver the programme's overall targets for additional homes and specific types of tenure.

In awarding contracts under the programme Homes England and the GLA assess the need for grant on a site-by-site basis.

In agreeing how much grant a project requires they will take into account the costs for building out the site with how much grant is needed to make that project viable, and the overall value for money for the programme.

David Simmonds: [\[15926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the written Ministerial Statement of 28 October 2024 on Social and Affordable Housing: Next Steps, HCWS169, whether the fund with Muse Places Limited and Pension Insurance Corporation is (a) grant funding, (b) a loan, (c) a financial guarantee or (d) a financial transaction.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government's investment into a joint venture with Muse Places and Pension Insurance Corporation, publicly branded as Habiko, is an equity stake into an investment vehicle – which can be classified as a financial transaction – owned equally between PIC, Muse & Homes England.

Homes England's investment was funded through the Levelling Up Home Building Fund and this partnership plans to deliver 3,000 low-carbon, low-energy affordable homes.

David Simmonds: [\[15927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the written Ministerial Statement of 28 October 2024 on Social and Affordable Housing: Next Steps, HCWS169, what methodology will be used to allocate the £47 million in relation to nutrient neutrality; and what the eligibility requirement for receiving the funds will be.

David Simmonds: [\[15933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024 to Question 5417 on Housing: Construction, if she will list the 60 local authorities affected by nutrient neutrality rules.

Matthew Pennycook:

At the Budget on 30 October, the Chancellor announced £45 million for seven local authority areas for Round 2 of the Local Nutrient Mitigation fund. The allocations were awarded to authorities affected by nutrient neutrality on the basis of bids submitted by them for mitigation schemes. A further £2 million was divided between the largest catchments affected by nutrient neutrality to support cross-boundary work on this issue. The authorities affected by nutrient neutrality were listed in the expression of interest for the fund, published on gov.uk on 23 May 2023.

Affordable Housing: Liverpool**David Simmonds:** [\[15925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the written Ministerial Statement of 28 October 2024 on Social and Affordable Housing: Next Steps, HCWS169, whether the funding at Liverpool Central Docks is (a) grant funding, (b) a loan, (c) a financial guarantee and (d) a financial transaction.

Matthew Pennycook:

This scheme will be supported through a £55.8 million grant from the Brownfield Infrastructure and Land fund to Liverpool City Council.

Building Safety Regulator**Mike Amesbury:** [\[15815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the (a) resources and (b) powers of the Building Safety Regulator to complete remediation of high rise buildings in England promptly.

Alex Norris:

The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) has powers set out within the Building Safety Act 2022 to facilitate building safety in higher-risk buildings (7 storeys or 18m+) as the government authority on building safety and standards. Since March 2024, all higher-risk buildings require a safety case report setting out how a building's safety

risks are managed, which helps to identify remediation work that needs to be undertaken. If the BSR is satisfied that the risks are being managed to the defined standards, they will issue a Building Assessment Certificate (BAC). There is regular, established governance in place to ensure BSR is discharging its duties and MHCLG continue to review such arrangements to ensure they are fit for purpose.

MHCLG continue to assess BSR funding through the ongoing Spending Review, to ensure that the most significant changes to building safety in a generation can be delivered on the ground.

Accelerating the pace of remediation remains a key priority for this government. The department has developed new Remediation Enforcement Guidance for Regulators, due to be published in the coming weeks. The purpose of this guidance is to support and empower regulators, including the BSR, to carry out more regulatory work and to ensure that building owners fulfil their duties to fix their unsafe buildings.

■ Buildings: Fire Prevention

Mike Amesbury:

[15797]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will remove the requirement for waking watches to be in place before funding is granted for the installation of a common fire alarm system in buildings where there is a simultaneous evacuation policy.

Alex Norris:

The Waking Watch Replacement Fund (WWRF) covers the costs of installing a common fire alarm to replace expensive waking watch measures in all eligible residential buildings. A waking watch must be in place for a building to be eligible for funding. The eligibility criteria for the WWRF reflects how fire safety risks should be managed by the Responsible Person as part of their duties under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and in accordance with sector led guidance published by the National Fire Chiefs Council. [SEG - 4th Edition - FINAL 17082022.pdf](#)

■ Buildings: Insulation

Mike Amesbury:

[15798]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 18 September 2024 to Question 5131 on Buildings: Insulation, how buildings are selected for Departmental visits; what support is provided to residents following those visits; and how long resident engagement continues for after those visits.

Alex Norris:

The Government is committed to understanding the experiences of residents to ensure that those affected are at the heart of the building safety agenda, and necessary steps are taken to mitigate the impact of remediation. Government officials have been conducting regular building visits to engage with residents and better understand their experiences.

The selection has been based on buildings within the Building Safety Fund that are at various stages of remediation: pre-remediation, during remediation and post-remediation. They are geographically spread throughout England so that a comprehensive understanding of resident experience of remediation is gathered. The intention is to extend this program of visits to other remediation programs.

Residents are supported throughout the visits to identify a suitable pathway for resolving remediation issues. Any issues raised are reviewed with the relevant delivery partners (GLA/Homes England), and progress is regularly monitored internally. Specific themes that are raised are escalated within the department.

The department offers various opportunities for residents to engage, including resident forums and our newly launched online feedback form, allowing residents to share their experiences and the impact remediation has on their lives.

■ **Civil Servants: Conditions of Employment**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has received representations from trade unions on introducing a four-day working week for civil servants working in her Department.

Alex Norris:

The department is aware of a campaign by members of the Public and Commercial Services trade union (PCS) on the introduction of a four-day week. No formal representations have been made to the department.

■ **Council Housing: Tenants**

Sarah Hall: [\[15967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a national standard for local authorities on the disposal of the belongings of deceased council tenants.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government has no current plans to implement a national standard for the disposal of deceased council tenants' belongings. The repossession of a property is a matter for the landlord concerned. They are best placed to manage what happens to deceased council tenants' belongings, carefully considering the family's circumstances. In doing so, we would expect local authorities to deal sensitively with cases before taking action to dispose of any belongings.

■ **Council of the Nations and Regions**

David Simmonds: [\[15932\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024, to Question 5299, on Devolution: Local Government,

whether council (a) leaders and (b) mayors were invited to attend the Council of the Nations and Regions.

Jim McMahon:

The Council of the Nations and Regions on 11 October brought together the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and the Mayors of Combined Authorities and County Combined Authorities in England.

The following Mayors from English regions are invited to attend the Council of Nations and Regions: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the East Midlands, Greater London, Greater Manchester, the Liverpool City Region, the North East, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, the West Midlands, the West of England, West Yorkshire, and York and North Yorkshire.

■ **Cultural Heritage and Publishing: Israel**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[15460\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has received representations on the call for a boycott of Israel's book industry and Israeli cultural institutions.

Alex Norris:

No records of such representations have been located.

■ **Devolution: Cheshire**

Mike Amesbury: [\[15813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her timetable is for implementing a devolution deal for Cheshire and Warrington.

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.

■ Employers' Contributions and Minimum Wage

David Simmonds: [\[15921\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's guidance entitled New burdens doctrine: guidance for government departments, updated on 29 July 2022, whether proposed changes to (a) employers National Insurance contributions and (b) the minimum wage are new burdens.

David Simmonds: [\[15922\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether local authority core funding will include funding for proposed changes to (a) employers National Insurance contributions and (b) the minimum wage.

Jim McMahon:

We have announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding in 2025/26 for local government to deliver core services. Together with local income from council tax and locally-retained business rates, this will provide a real-terms increase in total core spending power of around 3.2%, which can be used to address the range of pressures facing local government.

The Government has committed to provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional employer NICs costs. This applies to those directly employed by the public sector, including local government.

The New Burdens Doctrine does not apply to policies which apply the same rules to local authorities and to private sector bodies (for example changes in general taxation, or employment legislation that applies to all organisations), unless these have a disproportionate effect on local government.

■ Empty Property: Council Tax

Sarah Green: [\[16529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the time period for exemption from Council Tax for retirement properties left vacant after death of their owner.

Jim McMahon:

Where a dwelling is left empty following the passing of the occupant, the dwelling will be exempt from council tax until probate is granted or letters of administration are signed. A further six months exemption is available so long as the dwelling remains empty and has not been transferred or sold to a new owner. The government does not have any plans to change this exemption.

■ Energy Performance Certificates

David Simmonds:

[\[15920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her planned timetable is to consult on changes to Energy Performance Certificate methodology.

Alex Norris:

Energy Performance Certificates provide homeowners and renters with valuable information about the energy performance of their homes.

However, it is now widely recognised that improvements need to be made to the EPC system to improve their accuracy and reliability, whilst ensuring they are giving people a wider range of information. We are developing plans to address this and will shortly launch a consultation with more detail.

■ Gazumping

Jodie Gosling:

[\[15907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to tackle the practice of gazumping; and whether she has made an assessment of the effectiveness of voluntary reservation agreements in residential sales.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government recognise that the home buying and selling process in England and Wales is inefficient and costly for consumers and professionals. We continue to review evidence from other jurisdictions, including on reservation agreements, as we consider next steps.

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation

Mike Amesbury:

[\[15796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 13 September 2024 to Question 4416 on High Rise Flats: Insulation, how many additional buildings have registered with the Cladding Safety Scheme as a result of the use of (a) specialist data sources and (b) AI technology tools this year.

Alex Norris:

Homes England is currently prioritising a review of Ordnance Survey data to help identify residential buildings over 11m in need of remediation. Records are checked by Homes England for height eligibility and the potential presence of unsafe cladding. When a building is identified as potentially being eligible for the Cladding Safety Scheme (CSS), Homes England writes to the responsible entity inviting them to apply.

Since starting this work in August this year, over 29,000 records have been examined. This has resulted in the owners of 976 buildings being invited to apply for the CSS.

■ Homelessness**Fabian Hamilton:** [\[15745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to deliver the strategy to tackle homelessness; and what steps she plans to take to involve people with lived experience of homelessness.

Rushanara Ali:

The Deputy Prime Minister is leading cross-government work to deliver the long-term solutions we need to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness. This includes chairing a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, bringing together ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy.

We have also established an Expert Group to bring together representatives from across the homelessness and rough sleeping sector, local and combined authorities and wider experts to help Government understand what is working well nationally and locally and where improvements are needed.

We will engage with those with lived experience through a lived experience forum to ensure their voices are reflected in the homelessness strategy.

Mike Amesbury: [\[15814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of appointing a homelessness champion to lead cross-departmental work on homelessness.

David Simmonds: [\[15931\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has targets to reduce the number of people (a) homeless, (b) rough sleeping and (c) on social housing waiting lists.

Uma Kumaran: [\[16003\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle hidden homelessness.

Rushanara Ali:

The Government recognises that homelessness levels are far too high, and this can have a devastating impact on those affected. We will look at these issues carefully, including issues around hidden homelessness, to make sure we put in place services that meet people's needs.

The Deputy Prime Minister is leading cross-government work to deliver the long-term solutions we need to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness. This includes chairing a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, bringing together ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy. We have also established an Expert Group to bring together representatives from across the homelessness and rough sleeping sector, local and combined authorities and wider experts. We have no plans to appoint an external champion.

We recognise England is in an acute housing crisis and there is insufficient social housing to meet demand. This Government will deliver the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation, and has already set out a number of steps: [Housing targets increased to get Britain building again - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/housing-targets-increased-to-get-britain-building-again). Local authorities have the freedom to manage their own social housing waiting lists, so they can decide who should qualify for social housing in their area and develop solutions that make best use of the social housing stock.

■ Housing: Carbon Emissions

Luke Murphy:

[\[16002\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to implement the 2025 Future Homes Standard.

Alex Norris:

The Future Homes and Buildings Standards consultation was published in December 2023 and closed in March 2024; a government response, including implementation plans, has not yet been issued.

Government fully supports the need for low carbon homes and buildings, fit for a net zero future. We are reviewing proposals and feedback from the Future Homes and Buildings Standards consultation and will publish the Government response in due course.

■ Housing: Construction

Mike Amesbury:

[\[15795\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6436 on Housing: Construction, whether her Department is (a) monitoring and (b) reporting on the number of residential buildings requiring fire safety remediation that were built with (i) timber-frame and (ii) other modern methods of construction.

Alex Norris:

The department reports on the remediation progress of 11m+ residential buildings with unsafe external wall systems but does not routinely collect data on the structural archetypes of those buildings.

The Building Safety Regulator is responsible for monitoring risk in the built environment and advising government on any action required, in line with their duty under the Building Safety Act to keep the safety and standards of buildings under review.

Mike Amesbury:

[\[15811\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of a default nationwide Housing First model.

Rushanara Ali:

The previous government commissioned an evaluation of the Housing First pilots that were launched in 2018 in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region. All six reports have now been published, with the final report published in October 2024, and can be found [here](#).

This Government is currently developing a new cross government strategy, working with mayors and councils across the country to get us back on track to ending homelessness once and for all.

Mike Amesbury: [\[15812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of a ten year housing strategy.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the Hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 30 July 2024 ([HCWS48](#)), where the Deputy Prime Minister announced that we will publish a long-term housing strategy.

■ Housing: Fire Prevention**Mike Amesbury:** [\[15794\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the number of people living in leasehold properties with un-remediated fire safety issues.

Alex Norris:

The Government has committed to review how to better protect leaseholders from costs and take steps to accelerate the pace of remediation across the country. We will complete an assessment of any changes proposed on the market for leasehold properties and wider economic impacts, as was undertaken for previous reforms such as the Building Safety Act and Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act.

The department is monitoring an estimated 260,000 dwellings with unsafe cladding in occupied residential buildings 11m+ tall in the private and social housing sectors. Of these an estimated 89,000 dwellings are in buildings that have completed remediation, and an estimated 55,000 additional dwellings are in buildings that have started remediation. An estimated 116,000 dwellings are in buildings that have not started remediation.

Pete Wishart: [\[16125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help support people who are unable to re-mortgage their properties because of fire safety issues.

Alex Norris:

Ten mortgage lenders (banks and building societies) have signed a joint statement confirming they will lend on properties in buildings before they have been remediated.

Leaseholders should be able to re-mortgage their homes with one of these lenders, even before works have completed.

We will remain vigilant and continue to hold the ten major lenders to account following their commitment.

■ Housing: Insulation

Shaun Davies:

[16278]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will include a degradation factor for new builds that applies to loft insulation over time in her Department's proposed Future Homes Standard.

Alex Norris:

The Future Homes and Buildings Standards consultation was published in December 2023 and closed in March 2024; a government response has not yet been issued.

Government fully supports the need for low carbon homes and buildings, fit for a net zero future. We are reviewing proposals and feedback from the Future Homes and Buildings Standards consultation, including those on loft insulation, and will publish the Government response in due course.

■ Labour: Civil Servants

Kevin Hollinrake:

[15832]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many civil servants other than special advisers from his Department attended this year's Labour Party Conference.

Alex Norris:

Guidance on Party Conferences is published on gov.uk and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-servants-and-party-conferences-guidance>(opens in a new tab).

This is applied appropriately and robustly in MHCLG. There is no record of any breach of this policy.

■ Leasehold: Fees and Charges

Mike Amesbury:

[15816]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to prevent (a) freeholders and (b) managing agents from levying (i) high and (ii) non-transparent service charges on leaseholders.

Mr Bayo Alaba:

[15950]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help protect residents from excessive services charges.

Matthew Pennycook:

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

Local Government Finance: Disadvantaged**Mike Amesbury:**[\[15817\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure local government settlements take due account of levels of social deprivation.

Jim McMahon:

The government is taking immediate action to begin addressing the significant challenges facing local government by ensuring that funding goes to the places that need it most in 2025-26.

We are directing funding towards areas with greater need and demand for services (we have used deprivation as a proxy for this), and less ability to raise income locally, through the new £600 million Recovery Grant.

This will start to correct the unfairness of the current system by putting councils in the areas with greater need and demand for services on a more stable footing. This grant marks the first meaningful step towards preparing for reform that has been taken in over a decade.

Local Government: Hertfordshire**Lewis Cocking:**[\[15847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions her Department has had with Hertfordshire County Council on local government reorganisation.

Lewis Cocking:[\[15861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions her Department has had with Broxbourne Council on local government reorganisation.

Lewis Cocking:[\[15862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions her Department has had with East Herts Council on local government reorganisation.

Jim McMahon:

There have been no specific discussions on local government reorganisation between the Department and Hertfordshire County Council, Broxbourne Council, or East Herts Council. The Department is always open to hearing from councils about government in their local area.

The upcoming English Devolution White Paper will set out more detail on the government's reorganisation plans, including working with councils to move to simpler structures that make sense for their local areas, with efficiency savings from council reorganisation helping to meet the needs of local people.

■ Local Government: Standards

David Simmonds: [\[15929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7690 on Local Government: Standards, what her Department's timetable is for consultation with stakeholders.

Jim McMahon:

The Government will be launching the consultation on the local government standards regime, referred to in my previous response, at the earliest opportunity.

We are committed to working with local and regional government to establish partnerships built on mutual respect, genuine collaboration, and meaningful engagement. The measures outlined in the upcoming consultation reflect our ambition to create a rigorous standards framework that will actively contribute to ensuring local government throughout the country is fit, legal, and decent.

■ Mayors: Elections

David Simmonds: [\[15923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 7872 on Local Government: Elections, in which combined authority areas are mayoral elections expected to take place in (a) 2025 and (b) 2026.

David Simmonds: [\[15934\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024 to Question 5414 on Local Government: Elections, whether she plans to lay the associated legislation to allow the combined authority mayoral elections to take place in May 2025; and in which other areas combined authority mayoral elections will take place in May 2025 for the first time.

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.

Legislation to establish a new Mayoral Combined Authority covering Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council was laid in Parliament on 26 November and, subject to parliamentary approval of the legislation, their first mayoral election will

also take place in 2025. There are no scheduled mayoral elections in combined authority areas in 2026 currently.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Consultants

Dan Carden: [\[15517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much her Department has spent on consultancy fees in each year since 2021.

Alex Norris:

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.

Figures for consultancy spend are included each year in the Department's annual report. The corresponding figure for FY2024-25 is expected to be published by the end of July 2025.

Details of contracts awarded valued at £10,000 (inc VAT) or more are published on: <https://www.gov.uk/contracts-finder>.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Ministers' Private Offices

Sir Ashley Fox: [\[9072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much was spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices in her Department since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items this was spent.

Alex Norris:

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has spent £33,790.50 on the refurbishment of Ministerial offices since the dissolution of the last Parliament. This includes a spend of £16,554.89 to ensure Ministers are able to work outside of London.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Appointments

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[16179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will publish all correspondence between her Department and the Commissioner for Public Appointments in relation to the appointment of the MHCLG Lead Non-Executive Director on 21 October 2024.

Alex Norris:

I will place a copy of the department's letter to the Commissioner for Public Appointments in the Library of the House in the coming days. The Office of the

Commissioner for Public Appointments also publishes an annual list of direct appointments that the Commissioner has been consulted on.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Remote Working**

David Simmonds:

[\[15930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October, to Question 5413, on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Remote Working, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of 40% in-person attendance levels on public sector productivity levels.

Alex Norris:

We remain committed to maximising the benefits of hybrid working through fostering the best of time in offices, work with partners and stakeholders, and working from home. At MHCLG we see that spending more time together in person brings benefits to the work we do and our departmental culture.

Those benefits include sharing ideas more easily, collaborating effectively, solving problems and learning from each other, all of which are vital factors in delivering positive outcomes for the communities we serve.

■ **Mo Baines**

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[15805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what (a) interests and (b) political activities Mo Baines declared when she was appointed as Lead Non-Executive Director.

Alex Norris:

Relevant information will be published in due course as part of the annual publication of board members' interests.

■ **National Security**

David Simmonds:

[\[15935\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 9 October 2024 to Question 5674 on National Security, if she will list the key stakeholders who her Department is working with; and whether this includes (a) the Parliamentary Parties Panel and (b) political parties directly.

Rushanara Ali:

As set out in our manifesto, the Government is committed to strengthening our democracy, upholding the integrity of elections and widening participation in the democratic process.

The department will work closely with key stakeholders, including local authorities, the Electoral Commission, and where relevant the Parliamentary Parties Panel and political parties, to develop proposals which give effect to these commitments.

■ Planning Permission: Publicity

Chris Vince:

[\[15985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing online publications to be used to advertise public planning notifications.

Matthew Pennycook:

Planning law requires local planning authorities to publicise planning applications through various means, including site notices, advertisements in local newspapers, and publishing information on their website. We are exploring ways to enhance community engagement in the planning system, including by leveraging digital platforms.

■ Planning: Fire Prevention

Mike Amesbury:

[\[15799\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report: Phase 2 report, published on 4 September 2024, if she will take steps to ensure that fire safety is prioritised in all (a) housing and (b) planning policy.

Alex Norris:

The Government's priority remains ensuring that residents living in buildings with unsafe cladding are safe in their homes, now and in the future. We are committed to the highest levels of building safety, and the safety and standards of construction are kept under review. There have been important reforms since 2017 but there is more to do.

Government has an obligation to carefully consider the findings and recommendations from the Grenfell Inquiry Report. A full response to the report recommendations will be made within 6 months.

■ Private Education: Business Rates

Neil O'Brien:

[\[15820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Non-Domestic Rating (Multipliers and Private Schools) Bill, what definition her Department is using of mainly, in the context of schools that are mainly concerned with the provision of education to children with an education, health and care plan.

Jim McMahon:

The Bill sets out that where a private school is wholly or mainly concerned with providing education for pupils with an Education, Health and Care plan they will be exempt from the measure and therefore retain eligibility for business rates charitable relief. The wholly or mainly test is one which is common across various parts of

business rates and local authorities are accustomed to applying it. Wholly or mainly is generally taken to mean 50% or more.

■ **Private Rented Housing: Repairs and Maintenance**

Sarah Hall:

[\[15964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what data her Department holds per local authority of the number of times local authorities have had to conduct repairs of private rented sector properties when private sector landlords have failed to do so in each year since 2015; and what the potential cost to the public purse was for each local authority.

Matthew Pennycook:

The department does not collect data centrally on local authorities conducting repairs of private rented sector properties.

■ **Retail Trade: Greater London**

James Asser:

[\[16012\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to encourage investment in high streets in (a) London and (b) West Ham and Beckton constituency.

Alex Norris:

This Government is committed to supporting businesses and communities that make our high streets successful.

This means addressing anti-social behaviour and crime, rolling out banking hubs, stamping out late payments, empowering communities to make the most of the vacant properties, strengthening the Post Office network, reforming the apprenticeship levy, and reforming business rates.

We will also use High Street Rental Auctions, to provide local authorities in England with a tool to tackle vacancy, promote minimum letting standards for commercial units and flexible rents.

The London Borough of Newham has received UK Shared Prosperity Funding which, amongst other uses, has helped support local businesses in building their financial sustainability.

Our Small Business Strategy Command Paper, to be published in 2025, will set out this Government's intentions on supporting small businesses across key areas, including thriving high streets.

■ **Sleeping Rough**

Tom Hayes:

[\[16067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of hostile architecture on persons experiencing rough sleeping.

Rushanara Ali:

Rough Sleeping levels are far too high, and this can have a devastating impact on those affected. This Government is committed to addressing this and delivering long term solutions.

We have set up a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, to bring together ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy.

We are committed to providing the services rough sleepers need to leave the street and the support they need to prevent a return to rough sleeping.

■ Social Services: Finance**Claire Young:**[\[15879\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to paragraph 2.72 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, what assessment she has made of the potential impact on social care of a £600 million investment.

Jim McMahon:

This Government recognises the pressures on councils delivering social care services. Including the £600 million of new grant funding announced at the Autumn Budget, the Government is providing over £10 billion in 2025-26 Settlement funding for social care through the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF), the Better Care Fund (including discharge funding), Social Care Grant, Children's Social Care Prevention Grant and Children and Families Grant.

This funding, alongside income from unringfenced sources including council tax, can be used to address the range of pressures facing the social care sector. We provided more information on funding for local government in the Policy Statement published on 28 November, and further details will be included in the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

■ Storms: Disaster Relief**Sarah Gibson:**[\[16051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much funding her Department is providing to (a) residents and (b) businesses affected by flooding following Storm Bert in Chippenham.

Alex Norris:

My thoughts are with householders and business owners impacted by flooding after Storm Bert, flooding is a devastating experience for those affected. Government support for flood recovery, administered via the Flood Recovery Framework, is only made available in the most exceptional circumstances. Most recently this was after Storms Babet in October 2023 and Henk in January this year when over 8,500 homes and businesses were impacted. My officials will continue to monitor the data on impacts following Storm Bert and will keep me updated.

■ **Tree Planting: Recreation Spaces**

David Simmonds:

[\[15924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance her Department issues to local authorities on the rights householders have to plant a tree (a) within the curtilage of and (b) on a green space immediately adjacent to their property without the consent of their local authority.

Matthew Pennycook:

The department has not issued any such guidance.

■ **Unitary Councils: Kent**

Mike Martin:

[\[16063\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 10 September 2024 to Question 4498 on Unitary Councils: Kent, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of splitting Kent County Council into a number of smaller unitary authorities.

Jim McMahon:

The upcoming English Devolution White Paper will set out more detail on the government's reorganisation plans, including on working with councils to move to simpler structures that make sense for their local areas, with efficiency savings from council reorganisation helping to meet the needs of local people.

■ **Water Companies: Planning**

Alberto Costa:

[\[15758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of making water companies statutory consultees in planning applications.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government encourage water companies and other infrastructure providers to work proactively with local planning authorities to identify where supporting infrastructure will be required to meet the demands of new development.

On 23 October, the government announced an independent commission to review the water sector regulatory system and make recommendations to reform the water sector regulatory framework in England and Wales. The review is expected to report next year, and we will carefully consider its findings.

JUSTICE■ **Prisons: Crimes of Violence**

Rupert Lowe: [\[16108\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many assaults against prison staff foreign national offenders committed in each of the last ten years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. This information is unavailable.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY■ **Artificial Intelligence: Copyright**

Graeme Downie: [\[16027\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to reduce the use of (a) human-authored and (b) copyrighted content without license for generative AI models.

Feryal Clark:

The Government believes that greater certainty over copyright and AI would support growth in both the creative industries and the AI sector.

This is a complex topic, and we want to take the time to hear stakeholder views and carefully consider the issues, including the licensing of copyright content for use by generative AI models.

The Government is engaging with stakeholders to inform its approach and will soon be launching a consultation on a package of measures to address copyright and AI issues.

■ **Artificial Intelligence: Intellectual Property**

Graeme Downie: [\[16026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of IP theft on AI innovation.

Feryal Clark:

The UK is consistently rated as having one of the best IP systems in the world, allowing innovators to protect their IP and seek remedy through the courts when it is infringed.

We are not aware of widespread concerns about the potential impact of IP theft on the AI sector but welcome reports of any instances of theft, to inform our awareness on this issue.

■ Arts and Media: Artificial Intelligence

Graeme Downie: [\[16029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what estimate he has made of the potential economic damage to the (a) media and (b) creative industries of the use of copyrighted content by generative AI developers without a licence.

Feryal Clark:

We are aware of creative industry concerns relating to the use of copyright works by generative AI developers without a licence.

We believe that greater certainty over copyright and AI would support growth in both the creative industries and the AI sector.

This is a complex topic, and we want to take the time to carefully consider the issues and their economic impacts, including the use of copyright content by generative AI developers.

That is why the Government will soon be launching a consultation on copyright and AI. We welcome evidence of economic impact from the creative and media sectors.

■ Broadband: Telemedicine

Steff Aquarone: [\[16889\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with infrastructure providers about the compatibility of fibre-to-the-premises broadband and telecare products.

Chris Bryant:

Yes, the Government engages regularly with communication providers and network operators to ensure that the industry-led transition from the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) proceeds safely.

I have written to all telecare suppliers with Stephen Kinnock MP (Minister for Care, DHSC) urging them to stop selling analogue telecare devices that are reliant on the PSTN and do not function over fibre-to-the-premises broadband. On November 18th I hosted a roundtable specifically to discuss the protection of telecare users during the PSTN migration. At this meeting major communication providers agreed to extra safeguards to protect telecare users ahead of restarting non-voluntary migrations.

■ Project Gigabit

Victoria Collins: [\[16619\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what progress his Department has made on Project Gigabit since April 2024.

Chris Bryant:

Since April 2024, three new Project Gigabit contracts covering Lincolnshire and East Riding, Cheshire, and North Yorkshire have been signed.

A cross regional framework agreement with Openreach, has also been signed. The first two call-off contracts under the framework have been awarded, covering large parts of Wales and rural parts of England from Devon to Staffordshire. The first Project Gigabit procurements have also been launched in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

TRANSPORT

■ British Transport Police: Body Searches

Rupert Lowe: [\[15858\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to ensure that women can only be strip-searched by British Transport Police officers who were female at birth.

Simon Lightwood:

The British Transport Police (BTP) is operationally independent. Chief Constables must ensure that their force policies comply with all legal obligations, including under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and Equalities Act 2010.

■ Bus Services

Mike Amesbury: [\[16532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an estimate of (a) the average mileage of buses and (b) bus passenger numbers in the last (i) 12 months, (ii) two years, (iii) five years and (iv) 10 years.

Simon Lightwood:

The number of vehicle miles and passenger journeys on local bus services is available in the Annual Bus Statistics. In the table below we have calculated the average annual vehicle miles and passenger journeys on local bus services in England for the past year, past two year, past five year and past ten year periods, where the past year is the year ending March 2024.

	PAST YEAR	PAST TWO YEARS	PAST FIVE YEARS	PAST TEN YEARS
Average annual vehicle mileage (millions)	1,009	1,007	1,039	1,133
Average annual passenger Journeys (millions)	3,629	3,504	3,096	3,771

■ Bus Services: Loneliness

Mike Amesbury:

[\[16533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of improving bus services on social isolation.

Simon Lightwood:

The government knows a modern transport network is vital to preventing social isolation and providing access to services. That is why the government has committed to improving bus services to ensure they meet the needs of the communities who rely on them. As announced in the King's Speech, the government will introduce the Buses Bill to put the power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders right across England.

In addition, 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. Local authorities can use this funding to introduce new bus routes, make services more frequent and protect crucial bus routes for local communities.

■ Electric Vehicles

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[16707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of people who will own an electric vehicle in each year between 2024 and 2030.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department for Transport (The Department) doesn't hold an estimate of the number of people who will own an electric vehicle in each year between 2024 and 2030. The Department does hold an estimate of the number of Battery Electric cars and vans (BEVs) that will be in the vehicle fleet in each year. This has been provided as a proxy for the number of people who will own one. These projections were developed in late 2023 / early 2024.

There is inherent uncertainty in these estimates. These figures assume 'firm and funded' policies only, covering existing legislation, confirmed subsidy schemes and current taxation policy. The Government may bring forward other measures that could change this projection.

		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
BEV	Cars and vans stock	1,720,171	2,444,868	3,325,275	4,379,415	5,845,172	7,732,148	10,049,076

■ Gatwick Airport**Mike Martin:** [\[15980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions she has had with campaign groups opposing the expansion of Gatwick airport.

Mike Kane:

The Secretary of State for Transport has had no discussions with campaign groups opposing the expansion of Gatwick Airport.

Mike Martin: [\[15981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many times she has met with representatives of Gatwick Airport to discuss the proposed expansion.

Mike Kane:

The Secretary of State for Transport has not met with representatives of Gatwick Airport to discuss the proposed expansion at the airport.

■ Gatwick Airport: Night Flying**Mike Martin:** [\[15978\]](#)

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

Mike Martin: [\[15979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact on public safety of proposals to expand use of the emergency runway at Gatwick airport for commercial flights.

Mike Kane:

A proposal to expand use of the northern runway at Gatwick Airport is currently subject to a live application for a Development Consent Order, which will be determined by my Department. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment but all relevant matters, including safety and noise, will be thoroughly considered before a decision is issued, the statutory deadline for which is 27 February 2025.

■ Liquefied Petroleum Gas**Freddie van Mierlo:** [\[16830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the (a) consumption of liquefied petroleum gas by (i) classic cars and (ii) other vehicles and (b) availability of liquefied petroleum gas at forecourts.

Lilian Greenwood:

DVLA transport statistics show a steady decline in the number of vehicles licensed on UK roads that run on LPG. At their peak in 2010 there were approximately 50,000 vehicles compared to 27,000 at the end of 2023. As the transition to zero exhaust

emission vehicles continues, demand for the fuel is expected to continue to reduce. Decisions about whether and where to supply fuels, including LPG, are commercial decisions for suppliers and operators.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Disability**

Mr Paul Kohler:

[\[16836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had recent discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the potential merits of extending the VAT exemption for adapted motor vehicles for disabled people to include taxis.

Simon Lightwood:

The VAT treatment of goods and services is a matter for His Majesty's Treasury. One of the requirements of the Plug-in Taxi Grant, which offers a discount of up to £6,000 to support the uptake of ULEV taxis, is that the vehicle should be wheelchair accessible.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties**

Mr James Cleverly:

[\[16239\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how much Vehicle Excise Duty was raised from vehicles registered to addresses in the municipal area of Essex County Council in the last two financial years.

Lilian Greenwood:

The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost, as each relevant vehicle record would need to be manually interrogated to calculate the vehicle excise duty paid in the last two financial years.

■ **Public Transport**

Mr Paul Kohler:

[\[16834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help increase access to (a) demand-responsive public transport and (b) dial-a-ride services.

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. Local authorities can use this funding to introduce new bus routes, make services more frequent and protect crucial bus routes for local communities. This includes introducing Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services where appropriate and desired, as part of the overall bus network.

The Department is supporting 16 pilot DRT projects in 16 innovative demand-led minibus trials in rural and suburban areas across England through the £20m Rural Mobility Fund (RMF). Each scheme is taking part in a detailed monitoring and evaluation process. This will provide a strong base of evidence and good practice for

DRT and a better understanding of both the role it can play and the challenges associated with introducing it.

The Government's funding includes £3.8 million for community transport operators, through the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), supporting them to continue delivering inclusive and accessible transport across the country.

■ Public Transport: VAT

Mr Paul Kohler:

[\[16835\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had recent discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the potential merits of removing VAT from small-vehicle public transport.

Simon Lightwood:

The VAT treatment of goods and services is a matter for His Majesty's Treasury.

■ Railway Stations: Parking

Sarah Green:

[\[16536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of setting statutory limits on increases to car parking charges at stations in line with the cap on annual rail fare rises.

Simon Lightwood:

Car parking charges are not regulated and it is a commercial decision for the Train Operators. Local decision-makers have a better understanding of their passengers and will have a greater knowledge of other factors such as demand and the availability of other nearby car parking facilities.

The Code of Practice for Accessible Stations sets out guidance on Blue Badge provision and ensuring that parking payment facilities are accessible

■ Railways: WiFi

Victoria Collins:

[\[16620\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what data her Department holds on the proportion of train journeys that had Wi-Fi available on board in (a) 2023 and (b) 2024 to date.

Simon Lightwood:

The department does not hold this data as it is currently a matter for individual train operators.

Under Great British Railways, a wider programme to deliver improved passenger Wi-Fi connectivity will be considered.

■ Roads: Essex**Priti Patel:**[\[16759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when she plans to publish funding allocations for highways in Essex County Council for the 2025-26 financial year.

Priti Patel:[\[16760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 4.96 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, how her Department plans to allocate the additional £500 million for local roads maintenance baseline funding in the 2024-25 financial year; and by what method her Department plans to use to distribute that funding.

Lilian Greenwood:

This Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously and is committed to maintaining and renewing the local highway network. The Government will confirm 2025/26 funding allocations to English local highway authorities, including Essex County Council, in due course.

■ Unadopted Roads: Repairs and Maintenance**Alistair Strathern:**[\[16797\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what support her Department provides to highways authorities to (a) adopt and (b) repair and (c) upgrade (i) unadopted and (ii) ownerless roads that form key parts of local road networks.

Lilian Greenwood:

Unadopted roads that are not maintained at public expense by a highway authority are known as private streets, as defined by Section 203(2) of the Highways Act 1980. The responsibility for management of private streets rests with the owner, or more usually the frontagers, who are those owning property that fronts, or borders, the street concerned.

The Department has published guidance on gov.uk on “Highways Adoption: The Adoption of Roads into the Public Highway”, which was last updated in August 2022. It sets out how new and existing roads can be adopted by highway authorities so that they become maintainable at public expense. Any decision to adopt roads which are not highways maintainable at public expense is a matter for the local highway authority.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Harriet Cross:**[\[15991\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the evidential basis on which her Department's estimate of the total number of farms affected by proposed changes to

Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief included agricultural properties for which (a) only Agricultural Property Relief was claimed, (b) Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief were claimed and (c) only Business Property Relief was claimed in the 2021-22 financial year.

James Murray:

Information on APR and BPR reforms can be found in the policy briefing paper published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms/summary-of-reforms-to-agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief#statistical-annex-distribution-of-claims-at-death-for-agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-in-2021-to-2022>.

Additionally, more information behind the approach adopted is available in the Chancellor's recent letter to the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45691/documents/226235/default/>.

■ **Alcoholic Drinks: Excise Duties**

Cat Smith:

[15752]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of total cost to the Treasury of changes to alcohol duty rates in each year since 2013; and if she will make an estimate of the total cost of such changes in each year to 2030.

James Murray:

Since 2013, cuts and freezes to alcohol duty have cost the Exchequer £15 billion in total, in comparison to if the rates had increased annually in line with RPI as forecasted by the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR).

All changes to alcohol duty rates are announced at fiscal events and accompanied by Tax Information and Impact Notes containing policy costings, alongside other published documents.

The Autumn Budget 2024 policy costing for alcohol duty includes data until 2029. This can be found here: [Alcohol Duty - GOV.UK](#)

Further information regarding policy costings and alcohol duty receipt forecasts can be found using the OBR Economic and Fiscal Outlook: Economic and fiscal outlook – October 2024 - Office for Budget Responsibility

■ **Apprentices: Taxation**

Carla Lockhart:

[15842]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with her counterpart in Northern Ireland on ensuring that businesses in Northern Ireland that pay into the Apprenticeship Levy receive direct funding from the levy.

Darren Jones:

HMT ministers engage regularly with the Northern Ireland Finance Minister through the Finance Inter-Ministerial Committee.

While the Apprenticeship Levy is UK wide, apprenticeship policy and spending is devolved. This means that the devolved governments receive funding through the Barnett formula in relation to English apprenticeship spending as part of their block grant. The Block Grant Transparency publication breaks down all changes in the devolved governments' block grant funding from the 2015 Spending Review up to and including Main Estimates 2023-24. The most recent report was published in July 2023. It is for the devolved governments to allocate their funding in devolved areas as they see fit, including investing in their skills programmes.

■ Audiobooks: VAT

Victoria Collins:

[\[16010\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department plans to remove VAT on audiobooks.

James Murray:

There are no current plans to remove VAT on audiobooks. VAT is a broad-based tax on consumption, and the 20 per cent standard rate applies to most goods and services. VAT is the UK's second largest tax, forecast to raise £171 billion in 2024/25.

Tax breaks reduce the revenue available for vital public services and must represent value for money for the taxpayer. Exceptions to the standard rate have always been limited and balanced against affordability considerations.

Evidence suggests that businesses only partially pass on any savings from lower VAT rates. In some cases, reliefs do not represent good value for money, as there is no guarantee that savings will be passed on to consumers.

The Chancellor makes decisions on tax policy at fiscal events in the context of the overall public finances.

■ Bank Services

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[16473\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle (a) delays experienced by community groups for applications for community group bank accounts and (b) fee-less community bank accounts being closed and replaced with fee-paying business accounts.

Yasmin Qureshi:

[\[16474\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will have discussions with the banking sector on (a) delays in applications for community group bank accounts and (b) reports of community bank accounts being replaced with business accounts.

Tulip Siddiq:

The provision of banking services is a commercial decision taken by the banking sector.

In response to feedback from community account holders about difficulties in securing and maintaining suitable current accounts, UK Finance launched a website in July 2024, including guidance and a free Account Finder tool, to help voluntary sector organisations locate an appropriate account for their needs.

The site provides voluntary sector organisations tailored guidance to understand the structure of the organisation concerned, decide on their banking needs, and help ensure they have what they need to open and maintain their account. In developing these resources, UK Finance worked with charitable organisations, members, and regulators, with the aim of improving how community accounts are opened and run.

■ **Counselling and Psychiatry: VAT**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16245\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing VAT from services provided by (a) psychotherapists and (b) counsellors.

Tulip Siddiq:

Many services provided directly or supervised by registered health professionals are exempt from VAT, meaning no VAT is charged to the final consumer. However, this relief does not apply to professionals who do not have statutory registers.

The UK's approach of linking exemption to statutory registration is considered to be a clear and objective criterion for defining 'health professionals' for VAT purposes. We have no plans to make changes here.

■ **Cryptoassets**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[16706\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the keynote address made by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury at the Tokenisation Summit on 25 November 2024, what her timetable is for implementing the proposals on (a) cryptoassets and (b) stablecoins published by her Department in October 2023.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government has signalled its intention to engage firms on draft legal provisions for the cryptoasset financial services regulatory regime as early as possible next year.

■ **Debt Collection**

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[16607\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to (a) debt collecting companies to wait for decisions of appeal courts before taking action and (b) otherwise require improve the regulation of debt collection practices.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government expects fair treatment of individuals in debt and recognises the important role of responsible practices for debt recovery. We likewise recognise the negative impact that aggressive pursuit of debt can have on individuals, particularly where court action is involved.

The Government remains committed to improving debt collection practices across sectors and supporting individuals in financial difficulties relating to debt more broadly. While there are already a number of regulations and guidelines in place, we will continue to monitor the sector closely and engage with stakeholders to ensure that regulation keeps pace with changing circumstances.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**Graham Leadbitter:**[\[16016\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of classifying bi-directional EV charging as an Energy Saving Material.

Tom Hayes:[\[16087\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential merits of introducing tax (a) incentives and (b) subsidies for battery storage solutions.

James Murray:

The installation of qualifying energy-saving materials (ESMs) in residential accommodation and buildings used solely for a relevant charitable purpose benefits from a temporary VAT zero rate until March 2027. Following a Call for Evidence (CfE) last year, electrical storage batteries were one of the technologies added to the relief. However, as set out in the Government response to the CfE, at that time, the Government was unable to identify sufficient independent data regarding the efficiency of heat batteries. As such, they do not currently qualify for VAT relief.

EV charge points were also proposed to be added to the ESMs VAT relief by CfE respondents. However, they were not added to the relief, because their primary purpose is not to save energy or reduce carbon emissions, meaning EV charge points don't meet the objectives of the relief.

The Government currently has no plans to add further technologies to this VAT relief. Nevertheless, the Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the policy making process. Changes to the tax system are announced at fiscal events in the usual way.

■ Employers' Contributions: Retail Trade**John Lamont:**[\[15800\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department of the potential impact of changes to employer national insurance contributions on Scotland's retail sector.

James Murray:

A Tax Information and Impact Note that covers the employer NICs changes was published by HMRC on 13 November.

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.

■ Financial Services: Economic Situation**Clive Lewis:**[\[901601\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she is taking steps to help ensure that the Financial Services Growth and Competitiveness Strategy supports the wider economy.

Tulip Siddiq:

Financial services is central to the government's modern industrial strategy due to the key role it plays in financing growth across the economy.

The Chancellor's Mansion House speech set out how the government will work with the sector to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth. This included publishing pension reform proposals to unlock billions of pounds of new investment into the UK economy and reforms that will help the sector support the Net Zero transition.

■ Government Securities: Pilot Schemes**Callum Anderson:**[\[16259\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what criteria her Department plans to use to assess the effectiveness of the digital gilt instrument pilot.

Callum Anderson:[\[16260\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the role of the (a) Bank of England and (b) Financial Conduct Authority will be in regulatory oversight of the digital gilt instrument pilot.

Callum Anderson:[\[16261\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department is taking steps to involve private sector firms in developing distributed ledger technology for the digital gilt instrument pilot.

Callum Anderson: [\[16262\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps her Department is taking to manage potential risks associated with distributed ledger technology during the pilot digital gilt instrument issuance.

Tulip Siddiq:

This pilot would allow us to make more informed decisions on Distributed Ledger Technology's (DLT) potential future application to wider government debt issuance. Demonstrating feasibility on a government bond issuance will also support the private sector by providing a use case that will assist their own use and investment in the technology. The pilot puts the UK at the forefront of capital markets innovation. This experimental issuance is separate from the government's normal operations and overall debt issuance programme. The pilot will utilise the Digital Securities Sandbox (DSS), which opened for applications in September 2024. The DSS utilises temporary modifications to legislation to provide an environment where firms can use developing technology, in particular DLT, to create, trade, and manage securities, under the supervision of the Bank of England and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). This enables activity to happen in a controlled and monitored setting, ensuring that potential risks are managed while fostering innovation. I set out in a Written Ministerial Statement on 18 November 2024, that the government will engage with the financial sector in the new year to explore what the issuance could look like and the technology options available to facilitate it.

■ **Motor Vehicles: VAT****Helen Grant:** [\[15742\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reversing the changes to VAT on double cab pick-ups .

James Murray:

The VAT treatment of double cab pick-ups (DCPUs) has not changed. DCPUs are subject to the standard 20 per cent rate of VAT.

As announced at Autumn Budget 2024, following a Court of Appeal judgment, the Government will treat DCPUs with a payload of one tonne or more as cars for the purposes of Benefit in Kind and Capital Allowances taxation.

However, for VAT purposes, DCPUs with a payload of one tonne or more will continue to be classed as vans, meaning VAT-registered businesses will continue to be able to recover the VAT paid on them in line with normal VAT recovery rules. The definition of a motor car, and what does not constitute a car, for VAT purposes is set out in [SI 1992/3122 – Value Added Tax \(Cars\) Order 1992](#).

■ **Off-payroll Working****Neil Coyle:** [\[12072\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will pause action related to the IR35 loan charge while the newly announced review is underway.

James Murray:

IR35 rules are distinct from the Loan Charge.

The Government has now announced a further independent review of the Loan Charge to help bring the matter to a close for those affected whilst ensuring fairness for all taxpayers. The Government will provide further details on the review in due course.

■ Pensions: Reform**Irene Campbell:**[\[901594\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what fiscal steps she is taking to reform the pensions system.

Emma Reynolds:

The Pensions Investment Review, which I am leading, aims to drive the scale and consolidation of Defined Contribution pension schemes and the Local Government Pension Scheme. Our reforms could unlock £80 billion of productive investment into new infrastructure and businesses of all sizes.

■ Productivity**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[16709\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate her Department has made of the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on productivity in each year between 2024 and 2028.

Tulip Siddiq:

Delivering economic growth and improving productivity is the government's central mission. Since 2010, productivity growth has been less than a third of the productivity growth in the decade prior to the financial crisis. If productivity growth had remained at the previous rate of 2.1% per annum, then GDP per capita would be £12,500 higher in today's prices.

This is why the government is making further reforms to deliver long-term growth, including: ambitious planning reforms; a modern Industrial Strategy; the development of a 10-year infrastructure strategy; and the publication of the Get Britain Working White Paper. The government expects these measures collectively to have a positive impact on growth. For example, the OBR recognised that proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework "may enable greater delivery of new housing and infrastructure projects, which would boost the associated investment flows, as well as increasing productivity over the longer term".

In their Economic and Fiscal Outlook, published alongside the Budget, the Office for Budget Responsibility evaluated the government's announced Budget package on public investment as increasing the level of GDP by 1.4% in the long-term.

Jake Richards:[\[901597\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to increase economic productivity.

Tulip Siddiq:

Boosting productivity growth across the country is a key aim of this government's growth mission. By reforming the economy and increasing productivity, we will drive up prosperity and living standards across the UK. Our Budget showed that this government has a robust, comprehensive strategy for boosting productivity, and we are taking the steps needed to make up for fourteen years of stagnant productivity growth, including introducing planning reforms, protecting record R&D funding and launching Skills England.

Public Expenditure**Ben Goldsborough:**[\[901596\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to help ensure value for money in public spending.

Darren Jones:

At Autumn Budget, we launched the Office for Value for Money to realise benefits from every pound of public spending. We set out plans for a Covid Corruption Commissioner to recover public funds and we have cancelled the migration partnership with Rwanda.

Through Phase 1 of the Spending Review, departments were set a 2% productivity, efficiency and savings target to ensure that every pound of taxpayer money is well spent.

The next phase of the Spending Review will also have a clear focus on delivering value for money, driving efficiency and rooting out government waste.

Public Finance: UK Relations with EU**Stephen Gethins:**[\[901599\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment her Department has made of the impact of leaving the EU on public finances.

Darren Jones:

I refer the Hon. member to my answer to his question on this issue during the Topical Questions section of HMT orals today.

Small Businesses: Annual Reports**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[16513\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 7 October 2024 to Question 5667 on Small Business: Annual Report, what assessment has been made by the Office for Equality and Opportunity of the impact of the Financial Conduct Authority's

proposals on mandatory diversity reporting for firms working in financial services on non-financial reporting requirements.

Tulip Siddiq:

This Question has been passed to HM Treasury, as the department responsible for financial services regulation.

The Financial Conduct Authority is a non-governmental body which is independent from the government. The government does not make assessments of its consultations.

■ **Unemployment: Taxation**

Damian Hinds:

[\[901600\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of her tax policies on the unemployment rate.

James Murray:

The Office for Budget Responsibility's October 2024 forecast, which takes into account tax measures announced in the Budget, expects the unemployment rate will fall to 4.1% next year and remain low until 2029.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ **Political Parties: Discrimination**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16341\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will hold discussions with the (a) Equality and Human Rights Commission and (b) the Cabinet Office on the potential merits of issuing guidance to political parties on whether they are able to discriminate on the basis of (i) political and (ii) philosophical belief.

Anneliese Dodds:

It is for the Equality and Human Rights Commission to determine what guidance it issues to political parties. Equalities Ministers will have periodic discussions with their Cabinet Office colleagues on matters of mutual policy interest. 'Belief' is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, meaning any religious or philosophical belief, rather than political opinion. As such, the issue of guidance on political belief discrimination that purportedly related to the Equality Act's protected characteristics would be misleading.

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ Child Maintenance Service: Courts

Ian Sollom:

[\[15843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of backlogs in court cases on the ability of the Child Maintenance Service to ensure parents receive child maintenance payments on time.

Andrew Western:

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) takes the impact of backlogs very seriously and regularly makes assessments in order to ensure payments are received on time. The Department and HM Courts and Tribunals Service maintain a vitally close working relationship with an aim to ensure Courts have sufficient capacity for referrals made from the CMS and prevent backlogs.

For context, the CMS has a wide range of strong enforcement powers designed to get money flowing quickly, prevent the build-up of arrears and get children the financial support they deserve. Where parents consistently fail to pay their maintenance, the CMS may pursue unpaid maintenance through liability orders and sanctions granted by the courts. These include using Enforcement Agents (previously known as bailiffs) to take control of goods, forcing the sale of property, disqualification from driving or commitment to prison.

We are committed to making the most effective use of these strong enforcement powers and have made several improvements to our enforcement processes to make it quicker and more efficient.

■ Child Maintenance Service: Standards

Danny Kruger:

[\[15916\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what her planned timetable is for responding to her Department's consultation entitled Child Maintenance: Improving the collection and transfer of payments, published on 8 May 2024.

Andrew Western:

A consultation on proposed reforms to the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) was published by the previous Government on 8 May 2024. These proposed reforms included removing Direct Pay and managing all CMS cases in one service to allow the CMS to tackle non-compliance faster, as well as exploring how victims and survivors of domestic abuse can be better supported. This consultation followed the Child Support Collection (Domestic Abuse) Act which received royal assent in July 2023.

The consultation was extended by this Government at the end of July and ran until 30 September 2024. We are analysing the responses we have received, and the Government will publish a response in due course.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Fraud and Maladministration

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[16389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the cost of hiring 3,000 additional staff in fraud and error.

Andrew Western:

His Majesty's Treasury allocated DWP £110m to deliver on the fraud, error and debt Autumn Budget measures over the next financial year. As part of this, the Department is hiring an additional 3,000 staff to expand DWP's Fraud, Error and Debt (FED) operations.

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[16391\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the time taken to (a) recruit and (b) train 3,000 additional staff in fraud and error.

Andrew Western:

Currently the time taken from the job advert being created to the individual being onboarded is between 7 to 20 weeks. Training time varies by function with the majority of new staff needing three to six months to fully consolidate learning, whereas special investigator roles can require up to 18 months – although these only make up a small proportion of the 3,000 specified.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Training

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[16394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how long it takes to train a new staff member to process pension credit applications.

Emma Reynolds:

The current training for staff on Pension Credit New Claims is 10 days. The training includes focus on the steps to process an application, with more activities to help with engagement and understanding. The training has been designed using experience, advice, observations, and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders.

■ Employment: Women

Mike Amesbury: [\[15809\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to (a) support and (b) reduce the number of young people aged 16 - 20 not in employment, education or training.

Alison McGovern:

The 'Get Britain Working' White Paper sets out this government's plan to Get Britain Working and includes a new Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education led Youth Guarantee for all young people aged 18-21.

Our approach to the Youth Guarantee is to help all young people earn or learn. We will work in partnership with organisations at the national and local level to offer

exciting and engaging opportunities to young people. This could include apprenticeships, work experience, training courses or employability programmes.

We will act to prevent young people losing touch with education or employment before the age of 18, with a guaranteed place in education and training for all 16 and 17-year-olds, an expansion of work experience and careers advice, action to tackle school attendance, and steps to improve access to mental health services for young people.

Work is underway on the design and delivery of the new Youth Guarantee. Starting in spring 2025, eight mayoral authorities in England will pilot the Youth Guarantee trailblazers.

The Youth Guarantee will work alongside and complement the services offered to young people through a more seamless offer that provides young people a clear pathway to transition from education into employment.

Young people will continue to have access to the current core national offer and entitlements for employment support for people aged 16-24. This includes a mix of national and localised initiatives and provisions designed to improve skills, employability, and access to job opportunities.

Key elements include: the DWP Youth Offer, Apprenticeships, Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes, the National Careers Service, Skills Bootcamps, and the Flexible Support Fund.

Opportunities for all young people will be expanded by transforming the Apprenticeship Levy into a more flexible Growth and Skills Levy. As a first step, we will create new foundation and shorter apprenticeship opportunities for young people in key sectors.

These programs collectively provide young people with pathways to employment, focusing on addressing local labour market needs and individual barriers to work.

■ Household Support Fund

Danny Kruger:

[15918]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Household Support Fund.

Alison McGovern:

The Department for Work and Pensions is currently conducting an evaluation of the Household Support Fund that ran from April 2023 to March 2024, to understand the benefits of the awards made across England during this period. This will be published in due course.

Management information on the Household Support Fund from April 2023 to March 2024, including details of how funding was spent is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-4-management-information-for-1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024>

■ Maternity Pay

Alex Easton:

[\[15974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to help support the parents of (a) twins and (b) other multiple births; if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional maternity pay to those parents; and if she will hold discussions with Twins Trust on steps to support such families.

Andrew Western:

The DWP wants new mothers to be able to take time away from work in the interests of their own and their baby's health and wellbeing.

That is why maternity pay is primarily a health and safety provision for pregnant working women and is paid for each pregnancy, not in respect of each child. Maternity pay is not and has never been intended to replace a woman's earnings completely nor is it intended to help with the cost of having a baby; rather, it provides a measure of financial security to help pregnant working women to take time off work in the later stages of their pregnancy and in the months following childbirth.

There are two types of maternity pay available to pregnant working women

- Statutory Maternity Pay paid by employers to, and
- Maternity Allowance paid by the Department for Work and Pensions to eligible women (including the self-employed and women in employment who are not eligible for SMP).

Additional financial support is available depending on individual circumstances, such as Universal Credit and Child Benefit. The Sure Start Maternity Grant (a lump sum payment of £500) may also be available. For more information about benefits and financial support available to pregnant women and their families can be found on www.gov.uk via the Childcare and Parenting link on the home page.

In terms of wider support for parents, the Government committed in its manifesto to review parental leave to ensure that it best supports working families. This is an opportunity to engage with stakeholders on this issue. Further details of the review will be announced in due course.

It's worth noting that maternity pay is devolved to Northern Ireland and is therefore governed by its own set of legislation. The responsibility for maternity pay policy in Northern Ireland sits with the Department for Communities.

■ Medical Certificates

Danny Kruger:

[\[15910\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to publish a consultation on fit note reform.

Alison McGovern:

The call for evidence was launched under the previous government to seek views on how the current fit note process works and the support required to facilitate meaningful work and health conversations. It closed on the 8 July 2024 and received around 1,900 responses. We are still in the process of thoroughly analysing the responses received. These responses will play a crucial role in shaping our ongoing policy development.

Members: Correspondence**Nick Timothy:**[\[16792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish the terms of reference for her Department's quality assurance framework; and what steps she is taking to ensure that framework is adhered to when responding to correspondence from hon. Members.

Andrew Western:

The Department for Work and Pensions follows the Cabinet Office Guide to Handling Correspondence. This guidance is published on [Gov.uk](#) and sets out how all departments should respond to correspondence from hon members.

Drafters receive ongoing training, and each response is quality assured by a correspondence manager before being sent to Minister. The department aims to respond to correspondence within 20 working days.

The Cabinet Office publishes statistics on Departmental performance which can be found on the gov.uk website and can be viewed [here](#).

Pension Credit**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[16388\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a Pension Credit uptake target.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government is committed to ensuring that older people receive the support they are entitled to. That's why we have been running a nationwide communications campaign to promote Pension Credit since September. The latest phase of the campaign takes a new approach targeting friends and family - asking them to tell people they know about Pension Credit, encourage them to check their eligibility, as well as help them make a claim. It is running on TV, radio, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, on YouTube and on advertising screens, including on GP and Post Office screens.

As part of our wider stakeholder outreach campaign and in order to get the message out through as many channels as possible, we have engaged with key stakeholders and partners, including other government departments, local councils, housing associations, community groups, local libraries and service providers as well as charities and third sector organisations.

We have also directly targeted 120,000 pensioner households in receipt of Housing Benefit, identified as being potentially entitled to, but not currently claiming, Pension Credit.

We do not believe that setting targets for take-up of Pension Credit would be helpful or that they would work. However, we have committed to bringing together the administration of Pension Credit and pensioner Housing Benefit for new claimants as soon as operationally possible in order to ensure pensioners receive all the benefits to which they are entitled

■ Pension Credit: South Derbyshire

Samantha Niblett:

[\[16304\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the number of pensioners signed up to receive pension credit in South Derbyshire constituency.

Emma Reynolds:

Our nationwide communications campaign to promote Pension Credit has been running since September. The latest phase of the campaign takes a new approach targeting friends and family - asking them to tell people they know about Pension Credit, encourage them to check their eligibility, as well as help them make a claim. It is running on TV, radio, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, on YouTube and on advertising screens, including on GP and Post Office screens.

As part of our wider stakeholder outreach campaign and in order to get the message out through as many channels as possible, we have also engaged with key stakeholders and partners, including other government departments, local councils, housing associations, community groups, local libraries and service providers as well as charities and third sector organisations.

We have also directly targeted 120,000 pensioner households – including over 600 in the Derbyshire area – who are in receipt of Housing Benefit and whom we have identified as being potentially entitled to, but not currently claiming, Pension Credit. We have invited these pensioners to apply for Pension Credit before the 21 December 2024, which is the last date for making a successful backdated claim for Pension Credit in order to receive a Winter Fuel Payment.

■ Pensions: Warrington South

Sarah Hall:

[\[15966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people formerly resident in Warrington South constituency are claiming pensions whilst living abroad.

Emma Reynolds:

The Department does not hold the information to be able to answer this question.

■ Poverty: Budget October 2024

Danny Kruger:

[15914]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of Autumn Budget 2024 on trends in the number of people living in poverty.

Danny Kruger:

[15915]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of Autumn Budget 2024 on the number of people living in poverty by household type.

Alison McGovern:

We are committed to tackling poverty. We know that good work can significantly reduce the chances of people falling into poverty so this will be the foundation of our approach.

Backed by £240m investment, the Get Britain Working White Paper launched on 26 November will target and tackle economic inactivity and unemployment and join up employment, health, and skills support to meet the needs of local communities. We are taking the first steps to tackle poverty through our commitments to triple investment in breakfast clubs to over £30 million, introduce a Fair Repayment Rate for deductions from Universal Credit, and increase the National Living Wage to £12.21 an hour from April 2025 to boost the pay of 3 million workers. Alongside this, we are committed to reviewing Universal Credit and we will set out the details in due course.

HM Treasury have published distributional analysis showing the estimated impact of tax, welfare and public service spending decisions on household incomes, across the household income distribution. This can be found here [Impact on households.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/131444/impact_on_households.pdf)

■ State Retirement Pensions: Women

Mike Amesbury:

[15807]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 15 October 2024 to Question 7943 on State Retirement Pensions: Women, what her planned timeframe is for considering the views that have been expressed.

Emma Reynolds:

We have made it clear that we are actively considering this complex matter and aim to resolve it as soon as possible.

Ian Byrne:

[15872]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman entitled Women's State Pension age: our findings on injustice and associated issues, published on 21 March 2024, whether she has conducted an impact assessment of the issues raised in that report.

Emma Reynolds:

Ministers will comply with requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 for decisions in relation to the Ombudsman's report.

■ **Universal Credit: Children****Mr James Frith:**[\[15791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of setting out a roadmap for ending the two-child limit in the Child Poverty Strategy.

Alison McGovern:

We published the framework 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy' on 23 October and will explore all available levers to deliver an enduring reduction in child poverty in this parliament, as part of a 10-year strategy for lasting change.

The Child Poverty Strategy will look at levers across four key themes of increasing incomes, which includes considering social security reforms, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience, and better local support especially in the early years. This will build on the reform plans underway across government and work underway in Devolved Governments.

The Child Poverty Taskforce continues its urgent work to publish the Strategy in Spring 2025.

■ **Universal Credit: Young People****Victoria Collins:**[\[16011\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of Universal Credit rules for young people living in supported housing on their ability to find work.

Sir Stephen Timms:

People on a low income living in supported housing, can claim Universal Credit for help with their daily living costs and Housing Benefit for help with their housing costs. Customers living in supported housing are also able to access more housing support through Housing Benefit due to an exemption from the Benefit Cap.

The income taper in Housing Benefit ensures people in work are better off than someone wholly reliant on benefits. In addition to any financial advantage, there are important non-financial benefits of working. These benefits include learning new skills, improved confidence and independence as well as a positive effect on an individual's mental and physical health.

Notwithstanding these positive outcomes from work, the department acknowledges there is a challenge presented by the interaction between Universal Credit and Housing Benefit for those residing in Supported Housing and receiving their housing

support through Housing Benefit and will consider the issue carefully in partnership with stakeholders.

■ Welfare Assistance Schemes

Mr James Frith:

[\[15792\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans she has to develop a long-term strategy and funding settlement for local welfare after the Household Support Fund ends in March 2026; and whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of including provision for local welfare in the three-year funding settlements for local authorities.

Alison McGovern:

We want to fix the fundamentals of the social security system so that people are not reliant on crisis support for the cost of essentials. To support the upcoming Child Poverty Strategy, we will continue to provide substantial funding to Local Authorities to support those most in need.

That is why the Government is extending the Household Support Fund (HSF) by a further year, from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026. This will ensure low-income households can continue to access support towards the cost of essentials, such as food, energy and water.

We recognise that certainty helps Local Authorities to design and deliver sustainable plans for local welfare assistance. Committing to funding the Household Support Fund until 31 March 2026 will allow them to plan their approach with greater confidence.

As with all other government programmes, further funding will be considered in the round at Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Disability Finance Code for Entrepreneurship

Minister for Services, Small Business and Exports (Gareth Thomas):

[\[HCWS279\]](#)

Entrepreneurship is crucial for growth and innovation in our economy.

We want to encourage anyone who wants to be an entrepreneur to access the resources they need to thrive, but it's clear from research to date that significant barriers continue to hold back certain populations, including disabled entrepreneurs, and this needs to change. Eighty-four per cent of disabled founders feel they do not have equal access to the same opportunities as non-disabled founders.

One of the key issues preventing disabled entrepreneurs from starting and scaling up is a lack of access to finance. We want to work collaboratively with the private sector, financial services and the wider community to ensure we can address this. That is why we are today launching the Disability Finance Code for Entrepreneurship (DFCE), underlining the importance we are placing on boosting entrepreneurship for all as part of our plans for economic growth.

The DFCE is intended to drive engagement between the disabled entrepreneur community and the financial services sector in the United Kingdom, to build stronger relationships between disabled businesses and the financial institutions that support them. The signatories of this code will open up opportunities for disabled entrepreneurs through committing to implementing inclusive design principles, sharing evidence, supporting disabled founders and increasing activity to support disabled representation.

By building these relationships and championing diversity, equity, and inclusion, we can empower disabled entrepreneurs and boost the entrepreneurial landscape as a whole.

The Code's founding signatories include Lloyds Banking Group, NatWest, Barclays and HSBC UK, current delivery partners include UK Finance, the British Business Bank and Small Business Britain.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Implementation of advertising restrictions for less healthy food or drink on television and online

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention (Andrew Gwynne): [\[HCWS278\]](#)

This Government is committed to creating the healthiest generation of children ever and today we are taking another step towards achieving that goal.

Further to my statement on 12 September 2024, I wish to inform the House that today the Government will lay the Advertising (Less Healthy Food Definitions and Exemptions) Regulations 2024 and an Explanatory Memorandum before Parliament. This legislation enacts the provisions set out in the Health and Care Act 2022, which amended the Communications Act 2003, for a 9pm watershed on the advertising of less healthy food or drink on television (TV) and a 24-hour restriction on paid-for advertising of these products online. Alongside laying the Regulations, the Government is publishing a response to the technical consultation held between September and October 2024 on how the advertising restrictions apply to Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) services, which deliver TV and advertising live over the internet. The consultation response confirms that IPTV services regulated by Ofcom will be subject to the broadcast restrictions (9pm watershed), in the same way as other Ofcom-regulated TV and on-demand programme services, and we have clarified this in the final Regulations. The Government is also publishing guidance for industry on the food or drink categories in scope of the advertising restrictions to support their preparation for implementation.

Following previous policy consultations and the Government's response on 12 September 2024 to the consultation on the draft secondary legislation, the legislation and guidance published today provide businesses with further certainty in terms of the products, businesses and services in scope of the restrictions as well as practical guidance on their application, so that they can continue to prepare ahead of the restrictions coming into force on 1 October 2025. We will continue to engage with stakeholders during this period.

This delivers on our Manifesto commitment to implement the junk food advertising restrictions without further delay and in doing so we expect to remove 7.2 billion calories from UK children's diets per year and reduce the number of children living with obesity by 20,000.

Obesity is the second biggest preventable cause of cancer and costs the UK health service more than £11 billion each year. By taking preventative action now, the Government will begin fixing the foundations of good health and protecting the next generation so that it can become the healthiest ever.

The Government's response to the IPTV consultation and guidance on food or drink products in scope of the restrictions will be published on GOV.UK shortly.

TREASURY

■ HM Treasury Sanctions

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Tulip Siddiq):

[\[HCWS280\]](#)

On 3 December 2024, HM Treasury announced a sanctions designation under the Counter Terrorism (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. This regime is used to target those involved in terrorist financing on UK soil. This action is the first use of HM Treasury's sanctions power targeting an individual suspected of involvement in Northern Ireland-related terrorism.

The designation imposes an asset freeze on an individual suspected of being involved in terrorist activity by facilitating terrorism and associating with members of the New Irish Republican Army ('New IRA'). He is further suspected of providing or assisting others in providing financial services or making available funds or economic resources for the New IRA.

This action demonstrates this government's commitment to protecting the peaceful consensus of the people of Northern Ireland and to upholding the principles of the Good Friday Agreement in support of the UK's wider efforts to protect national security for all citizens and prevent terrorism.

The specific designation is:

Brian Sheridan – suspected New IRA financier who has control over Brisher Limited.