



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 4 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:10 P.M., 04 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

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ **Fraud: Coronavirus**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[16228\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, what recent discussions she has had with the Crown Prosecution Service on the prosecution of covid-19 related fraud.

Lucy Rigby:

This Government is committed to recouping public money lost in pandemic-related fraud. As promised in our manifesto, the Government appointed a Covid Counter-Fraud Commissioner, Mr Tom Hayhoe on 3 December. He is expected to engage with both the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Serious Fraud Office.

The CPS continues to bring those who have fraudulently exploited the pandemic to justice. In September 2024, an entrepreneur was sentenced to 18 months in prison for fraudulently securing a £50,000 Bounce Back Loan, which he misused for personal expenses and legal costs.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ **Business: Government Assistance**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[16229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on taking steps to help support high street businesses.

Gareth Thomas:

Revitalising our high streets is a priority for this government. The Secretary of State and I are working with MHCLG to engage colleagues across Whitehall in delivering a cross-government approach for creating better conditions for high street businesses to thrive.

This means addressing anti-social behaviour and crime, working with the banking industry to roll out 350 banking hubs, reforming business rates, stamping out late payments, empowering communities to make the most of the vacant properties, strengthening the Post Office network, and upgrading the new apprenticeship levy.

■ **Conditions of Employment**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill on the ability of employers to contact a (a) full-time and (b) part-time employee outside of their (i) normal and (ii) condensed working hours.

Justin Madders:

The right to switch off is not part of the Employment Rights Bill. It will be delivered through a statutory Code of Practice which will be the subject of a full public consultation in due course. The consultation will give interested parties the opportunity to comment on the specifics of the code and its approach to tackling work or work-related contact outside normal working hours. The responses will inform the final content of the Code.

■ Department for Business and Trade: USA**Andrew Griffith:**[\[16982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many officials in his Department have travelled to the United States of America (a) in the last 3 months and (b) since 5 November 2024.

Justin Madders:

We look forward to continuing to engage with the current and incoming US Administrations in the usual way. This includes through officials in the British Embassy in Washington DC, and our eight consulates around the United States, who continue to engage businesses and investors to champion UK interests and encourage collaboration and investment to help grow the UK economy.

■ Employment Rights Bill: Impact Assessment**Andrew Griffith:**[\[16981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the Regulatory Policy Committee's report on the Employment Rights Bill, published on 21 November 2024, if he will carry out new impact assessments to replace those rated not fit for purpose.

Justin Madders:

The Government has noted the Regulatory Policy Committee's opinion on the Impact Assessment for the Employment Rights Bill.

It has always been the Government's intention to refine our analysis as policy development continues, working closely with external experts, businesses, trade unions and the Regulatory Policy Committee.

As is standard, Government will publish updated Option Assessments and Impact Assessments alongside future consultations and secondary legislation to meet our Better Regulation requirements.

■ Nightclubs: Closures**Dame Caroline Dinéage:**[\[16140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what plans his Department has to help reduce the rate of nightclub closures.

Gareth Thomas:

We recognise the important role night-time economy business plays in supporting local economies and communities. Healthy night-time economy businesses not only support our creative industries, including musicians, DJs and performance artists, but also support tourism and bolster day economy businesses.

This Government is focused on its five-point plan to breathe life back into Britain's high streets. This work will ensure that our high streets are great places for our businesses, supporting economic growth across the UK.

To deliver the manifesto pledge to protect the high street, from 2026-27, the government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties with rateable values (RV) less than £500,000.

■ Parental Pay

Max Wilkinson:**[16297]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many couples claimed shared parental 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 Shared Parental Pay (ShPP). This data provides a broad indication of SPL take-up but does not include anyone taking unpaid Shared Parental Leave.

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

YEAR (APRIL TO MARCH)	NO. OF INDIVIDUALS IN RECEIPT OF SHPP		
	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL
2019-20	2,900	10,200	13,000
2020-21	2,600	8,600	11,200
2021-22	3,200	9,800	13,000
2022-23	4,100	10,200	14,200
2023-24	6,600	10,600	17,200

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.

■ Renewable Energy: Small Businesses**Tom Hayes:**[\[16078\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to review the (a) accreditation and (b) certification processes for renewable energy installers to ensure that they are accessible for small and medium enterprises.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) sponsors the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) as the national accreditation body. UKAS is independent of government, however DBT is working with UKAS to seek out and assess opportunities for supporting SMEs' participation in and use of accreditation. Certification processes are based on international standards and UKAS accredits to these standards to ensure certification bodies are fit for purpose. Where certification schemes exist, these are initially assessed by UKAS and reviewed on a regular basis by UKAS with the scheme provider.

■ Vauxhall Motors: Luton**Chris Hinchliff:**[\[16581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of Vauxhall's planned closure of its plant in Luton on North East Hertfordshire constituency; and if he will take steps to support (a) people and (b) businesses in that constituency affected by that planned closure.

Sarah Jones:

Stellantis announced on 26 November that it was starting a consultation with staff at its Luton plant on its plans for the future of its manufacturing there.

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

We will continue to work closely with Stellantis, trade unions and Hertfordshire County Council to understand the impact of their proposals on the economy of Hertfordshire.

CABINET OFFICE**■ 10 Downing Street: Art Works****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[16362\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 November to Question 15230 on 10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection, what the reference numbers are of Government Art Collection works that have been (a) added to and (b) removed from Downing Street since 5 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Hon Member to my answer of 31 October 2024, Official Report, PQ 8943.

■ Arms Length Bodies

Alex Burghart: [\[14108\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether framework agreements between his Department and Arms Length Bodies are approved by Ministers.

Georgia Gould:

Ministers have direct involvement in approving the strategy, outputs and objectives of Arms Length Bodies (ALBs). This ensures that ALBs remain aligned and can effectively deliver the commitments and objectives of the government. Ministers are responsible for the appointment of the Chair and Board Members, in most circumstances, through open and fair competition. The Board, once appointed, is responsible for maintaining accountability of senior officials to Ministerial objectives.

Framework Agreements are usually approved by the Principal Accounting Officer / Permanent Secretary on behalf of the department. However when revising a Framework Agreement, or establishing a new ALB, the relevant Minister will be engaged on the contents of the document.

■ Cabinet Office: Industrial Disputes

Nick Timothy: [\[11645\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what industrial disputes are ongoing within (a) his Department and (b) each of the arm's length bodies connected to his Department; how many (i) staff and (ii) contractors are involved in each dispute; what the form of industrial action is in each dispute; which recognised trade union is involved in each dispute; what the substantive matter is that is being disputed in each case; and what steps he plans to take to end each dispute.

Georgia Gould:

There are currently no ongoing industrial disputes with Cabinet Office employees within the Cabinet Office or any of its arms length bodies. There are, however, ongoing disputes between PCS and G4S Security Company (G4S) and International Services System - Facilities Management Services (ISS) who provide facilities management services to the Cabinet Office.

The hard work of security guards and other staff keeps the government running. As is longstanding practice under successive administrations, the Government does not provide a running commentary on ongoing disputes.

■ China: Foreign Relations

Yasmin Qureshi: [\[16146\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister raised Myanmar with President Xi Jinping of China during their meeting on 18 November.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Prime Minister raised a range of domestic and foreign issues in his meeting with President Xi at the G20 on 18 November. A read-out of this meeting is available on the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website.

Chinese Embassy: Planning Permission**Paul Holmes:**[\[14994\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister has had discussions with the Chinese government on the planning application for the Chinese Embassy in London.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The Prime Minister raised a range of domestic and foreign issues in his meeting with President Xi at the G20 on 18 November. A read-out of this meeting is available on the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website.

Civil Service Commission: Correspondence**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[16343\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will allow the Civil Service Commission to reply directly to hon. Members by correspondence.

Georgia Gould:

The Civil Service Commission is operationally independent from the government and is already able to respond to correspondence from parliamentarians as it sees fit.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Ministers' Private Offices**Sir Ashley Fox:**[\[12891\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 30 October 2024 to Question 9827 on Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Ministers' Private Offices, how much the Government Property Agency spent on (a) new furniture and fittings and (b) other refurbishment of Ministerial offices of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology since the dissolution of the last Parliament; and on what items.

Georgia Gould:

The Government Property Agency has confirmed £18074.22 excluding VAT was spent since the dissolution of parliament on 30th May on new furniture and fittings plus other refurbishment (including moves) in relation to private offices for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. This is broken down as follows;

- New Furniture and Fittings - £9985.38
- Other Refurbishment of Ministerial Offices including moves - £8088.84, of which £4,821.76 was incurred between 30th May and July 4th.

■ Departmental Coordination

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16338\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what progress the Mission Delivery Boards have made.

Ellie Reeves:

The government has already made significant progress on its missions since July; fixing the foundations of the country and kicking off the first steps to deliver real change. This has included stabilising the economy, the launch of Great British Energy, investing an extra £22bn to build an NHS fit for the future, establishing a new Border Security Command that will smash the gangs and tackle small boat crossings, and an additional £1.8bn to continue the expansion of government-funded childcare and help more parents stay in and return to work.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16342\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Government's Mission Boards have quantifiable targets.

Ellie Reeves:

The five Missions are focused on delivering outcomes that offer real and tangible benefits to citizens: higher living standards, protection for energy billpayers with secure home-grown energy, safer streets, longer healthier lives, and a renewed confidence that the future will be better for our children.

■ Electoral Register: British Nationals Abroad

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16333\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Office for National Statistics has made an estimate of the number of registered overseas electors at the 2024 general election.

Georgia Gould:

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

A response to the Hon. Gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 26 November is attached.

Attachments:

1. UKSA Letter [PQ16333 (1).pdf]

■ Government Departments: Contracts

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[14470\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what recent assessment he has made of the value for money of outsourced contracted services provided by (a) Capita, (b) Serco, (c) G4S and (d) Clearsprings.

Georgia Gould:

The Government will always aim to secure value for money and social value. With the creation of the Office for Value for Money the government will undertake value for money studies in specific high-risk areas of cross-departmental spending, and scrutinise investment proposals to ensure they offer value for money.

Government Departments: Procurement**Liz Saville Roberts:**[\[14469\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of ethical standards in business practice at (a) Capita, (b) Serco, (c) G4S and (d) Clearsprings when undertaking outsourced UK Government contracts.

Georgia Gould:

We expect the highest standards of business ethics from all suppliers. The Government will bring forward a new National Procurement Policy Statement under the Procurement Act that will deliver a mission-led procurement regime. It will drive value for money, economic growth and social value.

Government Departments: thebigword**Rupert Lowe:**[\[16295\]](#)

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

Georgia Gould:

All Government Departments are responsible for determining their own requirements for language services and ensuring these deliver good value for money for the taxpayer.

Details on how much is paid to individual suppliers, including thebigword, is not held centrally by the Cabinet Office.

Infrastructure: Weather**Andrew Rosindell:**[\[16463\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of extreme weather events on critical infrastructure assets in the next five years.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The government is committed to working closely with Critical National Infrastructure operators to ensure resilience and preparedness.

Extreme weather events pose a serious risk to UK resilience, reflected in their inclusion in the National Risk Register. They are included in the Third National Adaptation Programme, which sets out government action to respond to impacts arising from climate change. These products consider risks over a 2-5 year timeframe and enable relevant bodies to undertake proportionate planning.

■ Lobbying

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16340\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what guidance his Department issues on (a) Ministers and (b) special advisers meeting lobbying firms which have made donations to hon. Members from the governing party.

Georgia Gould:

There is longstanding guidance on meetings between ministers and external organisations which is set out in the Ministerial Code. Similar guidance for special advisers is set out in the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers. Further guidance on ministers' and special advisers' transparency returns is published on GOV.UK.

■ Ministers: Codes of Practice

Mike Wood:

[\[15192\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the new Ministerial Code, published in November 2024, for what reason a duty on ministers to comply with international law is included.

Mike Wood:

[\[15193\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the new Ministerial Code, published in November 2024, what assessment he had made of the potential impact of the duty for ministers to comply with international law on (a) protections for UK steel, (b) prisoner voting and (c) rulings of the International Criminal Court.

Georgia Gould:

Government ministers have always had an overarching duty to comply with the law, including international law.

■ Prime Minister: Aviation

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16318\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many international (a) air miles and (b) flights have been completed by (i) the Prime Minister and (ii) his staff since 5 July 2024.

Georgia Gould:

As was the practice under the previous Government, information about official overseas ministerial travel will be published as part of the Cabinet Office transparency returns and made available on the [GOV.UK](#) website.

■ Public Bodies: Business Interests

Mike Amesbury:

[\[16224\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if the Government will set a timeline for introducing central electronic registers for all public bodies; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of making these registers public.

Georgia Gould:

The most recent Public Bodies Directory, which contains the details of every administratively classified arms length body, can be found on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). An updated version will be published in due course.

Public Sector: Conflict of Interests**Mike Amesbury:**[\[16223\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to improve conflicts of interest management across the public sector.

Georgia Gould:

We are committed to restoring public confidence in government and ensuring that all those in public service are held to the highest standards.

We will consider carefully the National Audit Office's recommendations in its recent report 'Managing Conflicts of Interest'.

Special Advisers: Industrial Disputes**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[16347\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11270 on Special Advisers: Industrial Disputes, to which specific answer of 25 July 2024 he was seeking to refer to.

Georgia Gould:

The answer referred to was PQ 1667.

Special Advisers: Pay**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[16344\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Written Statement of 6 November 2024 on Transparency and Accountability, HCWS198, whether special adviser salaries will increase in line with (a) senior and (b) junior civil service salaries.

Georgia Gould:

Details of the special adviser pay award will be detailed in the relevant Annual Report on Special Advisers, published in line with the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**11 Downing Street: Art Works****Charlie Dewhirst:**[\[16604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what the reference numbers are of Government Art Collection works that have been removed from 11 Downing Street

since the general election; and what the reference numbers are of works that are scheduled to be removed.

Chris Bryant:

GAC artworks removed from 11 Downing Street since the General Election can be found in the table below. In some cases, artworks have been removed from No.11 as they have been committed as loans to public exhibitions at other museums or galleries.

GAC INVENTORY

13783

18355

18114/4

18114/3

18114/2

18114/1

17717

4742

12552

6193

2464

272

1636

279

12110

0/86

13349

18624

13333

9267

8765

GAC INVENTORY

8764

8762

8761

8757

7264

6670

3686

1723

350

0/25

■ Historic Buildings: Stoke-on-Trent North**David Williams:**[\[16306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to invest in heritage buildings in (a) Stoke-on-Trent North constituency and (b) Kidsgrove.

Chris Bryant:

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is committed to investing in heritage buildings, ensuring these buildings serve the needs of local communities. Historic England, the government's statutory advisors, have taken several steps to do this through;

- Supporting the Stoke-on-Trent North Council to find sustainable new uses for historic buildings in Burslem and the surrounding area.
- Funding emergency safeguarding repairs at the Wedgwood Institute, providing conservation architectural and surveyor expertise at no cost at The Leopard, Price & Kensington, the Wedgwood Institute and Burslem Market.
- Provided funding to support Re-Form Heritage, whose office is based in the constituency, in employing staff dedicated to delivering heritage projects.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has identified Stoke-on-Trent as one of twenty Heritage Places across the UK. Heritage Places is a UK-wide initiative to help places thrive by unlocking the potential of their heritage. Stoke-on-Trent council has been awarded £250,000 for collaboration and development of plans for preserving the

city's heritage. The Architectural Heritage Fund has also chosen Re-Form Heritage in Stoke-on-Trent to be part of its Heritage Development Trust programme.

Specifically in Kidsgrove, The National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded £9,700 to Engage Communities CIC for a project to explore the heritage of games and sports traditionally played by South Asian people engaging local young people in the project.

■ Music Venues and Nightclubs

Dame Caroline Dinage: [\[16136\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the level of nightclub closures.

Dame Caroline Dinage: [\[16137\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will (a) recognise and (b) support (i) nightclubs and (ii) venues as cultural institutions.

Dame Caroline Dinage: [\[16138\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to provide long term support for (a) nightclubs and (b) other venues; and if she will prepare and publish a nightclub strategy which provides clarity of regulation for nightclubs.

Chris Bryant:

The Government is working closely with the live music industry to support an economically sustainable music sector.

The Government response to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's report on grassroots music venues, published 14 November, sets out our commitment to working with the sector to support the sustainability of the entire music ecosystem. Cultural venues provide enjoyment to many thousands of people as the opportunity to hear live music up close is an essential part of our cultural life.

Following the Autumn Budget, we are continuing to support Arts Council England's (ACE's) successful Supporting Grassroots Music Fund which provides grants to grassroots music organisations - including those that host or promote electronic music – including venues, rehearsal and recording studios, promoters and festivals. ACE continues to engage with industry through targeted webinars and events to promote the Fund to the club sector and encourage applications.

This Government is focused on our five-point plan to breathe life back into Britain's high streets, to ensure they are great places for businesses, and economic growth across the UK.

To deliver our manifesto pledge to protect the high street, from 2026-27, the government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties with rateable values (RV) less than £500,000. To provide further support, the government has extended RHL relief at 40% for 2025-26.

We have no plans to develop a separate night clubs strategy, but would be interested in hearing from her Select Committee if it has suggestions in this area.

■ Religious Buildings: Conservation

Stuart Anderson: [\[16284\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support places of worship in rural areas with building conservation projects.

Chris Bryant:

There is a range of funding available via DCMS and the Department's Arm's-Length Bodies that supports places of worship, including in rural areas. These include Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme; the National Lottery Heritage Fund's £15m Heritage in Need: Places of Worship initiative, funded through the National Lottery between 2023 and 2026; the Churches Conservation Trust, which funds repairs and maintenance of over 350 churches in the CCT portfolio; and Historic England's Heritage At Risk grants, funding £9 million worth of repairs to buildings on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register between April 2024 and March 2025.

■ Tourism Industry Council: Passenger Ships

Ben Lake: [\[15279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to invite representatives from the cruise industry to sit on the Tourism Industry Council when it is re-established.

Chris Bryant:

The department is in the process of setting up the new Visitor Economy Council and will share details of the membership as soon as possible when it is confirmed.

■ Tourism: Rural Areas

Samantha Niblett: [\[16628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to increase tourism in rural areas.

Chris Bryant:

The Government recognises the importance of tourism to rural constituencies, including its contribution to economic growth and pride in place of an area, and an integral part of the UK's tourism offering. Britain's coastline is a particular attraction to international visitors with 10% of all visits to the UK including the coast or a beach, rising to [34%](#) amongst those visiting Wales.

DCMS continues to work with VisitBritain/VisitEngland to champion visits to the British countryside to a worldwide audience. Promoting rural areas, with a dedicated webpage on its consumer site which highlights rural areas to visit across the nations and regions of Britain that celebrate the UK's diverse attractions. This is part of our commitment to spreading tourism's benefits and creating an inclusive, regional

growth model. DCMS, through VisitEngland, has also accredited 35 Local Visitor Economy Partnerships so far; which aims to drive investment and spend across the regions - including in rural areas.

The North East Destination Development Partnership (DDP) is in its third year of delivery and interim evaluation results have found that it has supported over 1,000 businesses, saw a 14% increase in the value of the visitor economy, a 5% increase in visitor numbers, as well as building a pipeline of £125 million of investment, and building the case for a new ferry route to Norway.

VisitBritain's new GREAT-funded international marketing campaign will launch in early 2025. 'Starring GREAT Britain' will use the hook of Britain's rich film and television history to encourage more international visitors to explore across Britain, including many rural destinations.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces: Expenditure

Helen Maguire:

[\[17060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an estimate of the proportionate change in (a) spending on service personnel in (i) real and (ii) cash terms and (b) the number of frontline service personnel in each financial year between 2015-16 and 2024-25.

Al Carns:

The information you have requested is set out in the table below. The figures for financial year 2024-25 will be available once the accounts have been closed and audited. All personnel numbers are as at 1 April of the relevant financial year.

FINANCIAL

YEAR	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Spend on Service Personnel in Cash Terms (£million)	9,319	9,623	9,684	9,785	10,691	11,269	11,184	11,449	11,954
Spend on Service Personnel in Real Terms (£million at	12,050	12,169	12,056	11,931	12,734	12,738	12,716	12,151	11,954

FINANCIAL

YEAR	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
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Constant
2023-24
prices)

Total UK Regular Forces	153,724	150,996	149,366	146,556	144,428	145,317	149,280	147,978	142,556
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of which Royal Navy and Royal Marines	32,739	32,502	32,544	32,483	32,537	32,755	33,848	33,929	32,840
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of which Army	87,058	85,038	83,561	81,116	79,029	79,624	82,231	80,730	77,536
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of which Royal Air Force	33,927	33,456	33,261	32,957	32,862	32,938	33,201	33,319	32,180
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■ **Artillery: Procurement**

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[16467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the timeline is for the delivery of the Mobile Fires Platform; and what the potential impact is of delays to the programme on the Army's long-range artillery capabilities.

Maria Eagle:

The Mobile Fires Platform will deliver the Army's Close Support Fires capability. The project aims to achieve Minimum Deployable Capability (MDC) within this decade and will deliver the Remote-Controlled Howitzer 155mm (RCH 155) Calibre Wheeled Artillery System through a collaborative procurement with Germany. The project is in its assessment phase and a timeline or definition of MDC is yet to be determined, both of which will be guided by the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR).

The Army is currently undergoing a combined programme of work to ensure our Land Forces will have the lethality, protection and mobility to fight and win against any adversary. Whilst the Army's modernisation will continue over the next decade with a programme of investment worth billions of pounds, future capability development priorities, including long-range artillery capabilities, will be guided by the SDR.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Military Bases**

James Cartlidge:

[\[16749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the oral contribution of the Secretary of State for Defence in response to the question from the hon. Member for South Suffolk during Oral Questions to the Ministry for Defence on 18 November 2024, for what reason he will not publish the cost of the Chagos settlement.

Luke Pollard:

As confirmed in my response to the hon Member's oral question to me during urgent questions on 2 December 2024, he will know as a former Defence Minister, while the Ministry of Defence routinely discloses running costs for overseas bases and training areas it is long-standing policy, followed by successive Governments, that payments made by Government to Governments are not revealed.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**

James Cartlidge:

[\[17020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list meetings between his Department and relevant US stakeholders on the Chagos Islands since 5 July 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Ministry of Defence and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office personnel have been engaging with counterparts in the US Department of Defense, the State Department and National Security Council multiple times each week since 5 July 2024.

James Cartlidge:

[\[17021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had discussions with his US counterpart on the cost of the new settlement with the Chagos Islands to the (a) UK and (b) US.

Luke Pollard:

This historic agreement protects the long-term secure operation of the UK-US base on Diego Garcia, which plays such a crucial role in regional and international security.

The base is a joint UK-US facility and is an essential part of the UK-US defence relationship. Discussions between the Secretary of State and his US counterpart will continue to cover all aspects of the future operation of the base.

■ **Capita: Contracts**

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[16461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of Capita's performance on delivering defence related contracts; and what assessment he has made of the value for money of these contracts.

Maria Eagle:

The performance of all the Ministry of Defence's suppliers is continually assessed on a project by project basis as part of the Department's contract management activities. As a strategic supplier to the UK Government, Capita participates in the Cabinet Office Strategic Partnering Programme which employs an innovative partnering approach to improve performance and value for money in existing contracts.

Defence Equipment: Procurement

James Cartlidge: [\[17024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has instructed Defence Equipment and Support to put a hold on new procurement in this financial year.

Maria Eagle:

We continue to review and spend on our priorities as part of normal financial management. Our approach applies to the whole Department and is not specific to Defence Equipment and Support.

Defence: Procurement

James Cartlidge: [\[17025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he last issued instructions to his Department on the threshold for financial sign-off of new procurements; and what those instructions were.

Maria Eagle:

We continue to review and spend on our priorities as part of normal financial management. There have been a number of communications as part of departmental business to enable us to get a grip of defence spending. We are committed to securing value for money for taxpayers and cutting waste, for instance taking immediate action to stop all non-essential Government consultancy spending in financial year 2024-25.

Gaza: Israel

Kim Johnson: [\[16323\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many potential violations of international humanitarian law by Israel he has assessed since 8 October 2023.

Luke Pollard:

The MOD works closely with the FCDO, who continue to assess Israel's commitment and capability to comply with International Humanitarian Law.

Israel Defense Forces

Chris Law: [\[16506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he met the Chief of the General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces during his visit to the UK in November 2024.

Luke Pollard:

As part of the concerted UK effort, along with allies and partners, to reach a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza, the Chief of the Defence Staff hosted his counterparts from Israel and other international partners on Monday 25 November. The Secretary of State did not meet with Lieutenant General Halevi.

Discussions recognised Israel's right to security, as well as including the UK calls for an immediate ceasefire in both Lebanon and Gaza, the need for greater humanitarian access into Gaza, the release of all hostages, and the requirement for all parties to comply with international humanitarian law.

We continue to work with international partners to encourage de-escalation and promote long-term peace and security in the Middle East.

LE TacCIS programme**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[16468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the status is of the Morpheus communications programme; and whether there are delays.

Maria Eagle:

MORPHEUS is a project within the Land Environment Tactical Communication and Information Systems (LETacCIS) Programme and is currently delayed. Work to reset the project remains ongoing, and an Independent Project Review, led by the Cabinet Office's Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA), will take place in early 2025 and inform next steps.

Military Aircraft: Deployment**Graeme Downie:**[\[16582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many quick reaction alert launches there have been from RAF (a) Coningsby and (b) Lossiemouth in each month in 2024.

Luke Pollard:

Quick Reaction Alert from either RAF Coningsby or RAF Lossiemouth were launched on the following number of days in each month of 2024 up to the end of November:

JANUARY	0
February	2
March	1
April	0
May	0
June	0
July	0

JANUARY	0
August	0
September	2
October	1
November	1

Graeme Downie: [\[16583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many quick reaction alert launches there were from RAF (a) Coningsby and (b) RAF Lossiemouth in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Luke Pollard:

Quick Reaction Alert from either RAF Coningsby or RAF Lossiemouth were launched on six days in 2022 and on nine days in 2023.

■ **Military Aircraft: Exhaust Emissions**

James Cartlidge: [\[17019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to assess the extent to which (a) aircrew and (b) other personnel were exposed to toxic fumes whilst operating (i) helicopters and (ii) other aircraft.

Al Carns:

The Ministry of Defence is committed to the health and wellbeing of our people.

In response to concerns, the Department has previously conducted testing of the now out of service Sea King helicopter.

The Department is initiating the testing of the exhaust emissions of in-service helicopters to ensure we are meeting our duty of care for personnel. It is essential that we can assure our people of their safety at work.

■ **Military Aircraft: Helicopters**

James Cartlidge: [\[16215\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the operational lifespan of the Airbus H145 helicopter.

Maria Eagle:

The Airbus Helicopters H145 is in service as a training helicopter called the Jupiter HT1. This helicopter type is contractor owned, under the rotary wing flying training contract which runs until 2033. It would be for the contractor to manage the operational lifespan of the Jupiter airframes.

James Cartlidge:

[\[16735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to increase the level of funding available for the New Medium Helicopter programme in the Strategic Defence Review.

Maria Eagle:

The Strategic Defence Review will guide future capability development priorities, to ensure the United Kingdom is both secure at home and strong abroad - now and for the years to come. The Reviewers will make their final report in the first half of 2025, and it is therefore only right that we do not prejudice the details of the review at this stage.

The New Medium Helicopter (NMH) Programme is an initiative to acquire a modern medium-lift support helicopter, addressing multiple rotary wing requirements to improve efficiency and operational flexibility. The NMH programme is part of a wider holistic approach on the MOD's use of rotary wing. The tender evaluation is now ongoing and is expected to complete in the first half of 2025.

Helen Morgan:

[\[17028\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if his Department will take steps to discover the full extent of health issues in aircrew exposed to (a) fuel and (b) exhaust fumes from helicopters.

Al Carns:

The Ministry of Defence is committed to the health and wellbeing of our people.

The Independent Medical Expert Group (IMEG) was previously tasked to review independently the evidence base for causality between Sea King helicopter exhaust fumes and rare cancers. The report by the IMEG concluded that the evidence did not meet internationally adopted criteria for causation of these rare cancers.

The Department will continue to monitor medical evidence and respond accordingly.

■ Navy: Vacancies

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[16472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many vacancies there are for (a) engineers, (b) submariners and (c) other critical roles in the Royal Navy.

Al Carns:

The Royal Navy continues to fill the highest priority roles first in accordance with current and future output requirements. Where demand exceeds supply, the Royal Navy and employers actively prioritise where personnel are assigned. Due to operational security, The Royal Navy does not comment on the number of specific vacancies for critical roles.

■ Nuclear Weapons

Manuela Perteghella: [\[16574\]](#)

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

Maria Eagle:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard) on 27 November 2024 to Question 15093.

Attachments:

1. Nuclear Weapons [15093 - Nuclear Weapons.docx]

■ Nuclear Weapons: Testing

Dame Caroline Dinenge: [\[16482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what medical assessments conducted at the time of nuclear weapons tests were disclosed to nuclear test veterans.

Al Carns:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings on Question 14583 on 26 November 2024.

Attachments:

1. Veterans: Radiation Exposure [UIN 14583.docx]

■ Office for Veterans' Affairs: Staff

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[16586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many civil servants from his Department are assigned to work directly for the Office for Veterans' Affairs.

Al Carns:

As of 28 November 2024, 49 civil servants work in the Office for Veterans' Affairs.

■ Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021

Brendan O'Hara: [\[16936\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has plans to repeal the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Victims) Act 2021.

Al Carns:

We have no plans to repeal the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021.

■ Puma Helicopters

Mr Mark Francois: [\[16457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the early retirement of Puma Helicopters on capability gaps.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence takes a rigorous approach in assessing the risk of any capability gaps. The Department is exploring options to fulfil some short-term capability gaps in Cyprus and Brunei before the H-145 platform enters services from 2026. Defence's Strategic Objectives will continue to be fulfilled.

■ Russia: Ukraine

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[16236\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department plans to restart regular written intelligence briefings to hon. Members on the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Luke Pollard:

Since the new Government was formed we have held two oral briefings for Parliamentarians on Ukraine, with a third planned before Christmas. These offered Parliamentarians the chance to be briefed and ask questions about developments in Ukraine.

Regular written intelligence assessments on the conflict will resume in the New Year.

■ Strategic Defence Review

Mr Mark Francois: [\[16476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he plans to publish the Strategic Defence Review.

Luke Pollard:

As previously announced by the Secretary of State for Defence to the House of Commons, the Reviewers will make their final report to the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for Defence in the Spring of 2025. The Secretary of State for Defence will subsequently publish a version of that report to Parliament.

■ USA: Veterans

Dr Andrew Murrison: [\[16145\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 13744 on USA: Veterans, what platforms his Department has used to encourage (a) Service personnel, (b) veterans and (c) dependents previously based in Camp Lejeune to write to his Department for advice.

AI Carns:

The Department has released several statements encouraging those who think they may have been affected by contaminated water at Camp Lejeune to contact the Department, through an article on Gov.uk, and on the Department's social media accounts on platforms such as X. Again, it is worth noting that the US compensation scheme was in place for almost two years before the new Ministerial team were notified and took swift action.

I once again encourage anyone who was based at Camp Lejeune between 1 August 1953 and 31 December 1987 to write to the Ministry of Defence so that we may provide them with the appropriate advice. We take the safety of our personnel very seriously and any veteran that may have served at Camp Lejeune during this period and believe that their health was affected can apply for compensation under the War Pension Scheme.

■ Veterans: Runcorn and Helsby**Mike Amesbury:**[\[16531\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to support veterans in Runcorn and Helsby 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 in Runcorn and Helsby, and throughout the North West of England, get access to the health, housing, employment and other support they need.

A range of support is in place for veterans. In England Op RESTORE provides specialist care to veterans who have physical health problems, and Op COURAGE, a mental health specialist service helps veterans and their families.

Housing support is available across the United Kingdom via Op FORTITUDE, a single referral pathway to connect veterans with help and support. This system provides housing guidance and assistance to veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. As of 24 November 2024, over 2,850 referrals have been made and nearly 816 veterans have been supported into housing.

The Prime Minister announced the continuation of funding for the cross-UK Reducing Veterans Homelessness Programme and Op FORTITUDE. 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.

Veterans can also access a range of tailored employment support, including the Career Transition Partnership, which is the initial point of provision for those leaving military service in search of new job opportunities.

EDUCATION■ **Academies: Curriculum****James McMurdock:**[\[16423\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of reductions in levels of academy staffing on the range of subjects offered in those academies for students already enrolled in (a) GCSE and (b) A Level courses.

James McMurdock:[\[16425\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that academy trusts consult with the wider school community in cases where significant (a) staffing and (b) curriculum changes are proposed.

James McMurdock:[\[16430\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential long-term impact of (a) leadership changes and (b) staff reductions in academy schools on trends in the level of (i) academic performance and (ii) student well-being.

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. This is why the department will recruit 6,500 new expert teachers. We will get more teachers into shortage subjects, support areas that face recruitment challenges and tackle retention issues.

There are now 468,693 full-time equivalent teachers in state-funded schools in England. The department's initiatives are aimed not only at increasing teacher recruitment in key subjects and areas, but also at ensuring teachers stay and thrive in the profession, including by improving teacher wellbeing and workload.

All state schools are free to decide which qualifications they will offer in each subject they teach, including GCSEs and A levels. All schools must appoint staff in accordance with employment law.

Academies and free schools have greater freedom and autonomy in how they operate, including staffing and the curriculum, but they are expected to teach a curriculum that is broad and balanced. Schools' decisions on curriculum will be determined by a range of factors, including the level of demand from pupils for particular courses, the availability of suitably qualified teaching staff, accommodation and facilities, and the practical constraints of the timetable.

All state schools, including academies and free schools, will be held accountable for their performance, including in tests and exams. We publish key stage 2 and key stage 4 school attainment data every academic year.

Key stage 2 data can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment/2023-24>.

Key stage 4 data can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance>.

This government is committed to enabling schools to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This is critical to breaking down barriers to opportunity and learning. The right support should be available to every young person that needs it, which is why the department will provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school.

■ Academies: Finance

James McMurdock:

[16432]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of exploring alternative funding models for academy schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

The schools national funding formula (NFF) distributes funding for mainstream schools based on schools' and pupils' needs and characteristics. This treats academies and local authority-maintained schools equivalently.

In 2025/26, as in previous years, local authorities will be responsible for deciding local funding formulae that determine the actual funding allocations for individual mainstream schools in their area. The department uses the respective local funding formulae to calculate funding allocations to academies, which again ensures that academies and maintained schools are funded on an equivalent basis.

The schools NFF for 2025/26 was published on 28 November, with details of the provisional allocations at local authority and school level available here:

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

■ Academies: Public Consultation

James McMurdock:

[16426]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has plans to (a) introduce and (b) increase the requirements whereby academy trusts engage with local communities when implementing major changes.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department's 'Making significant changes to an academy' guidance, sets out the process academy trusts must follow when making changes to an academy, such as expansion or removal of capacity, by more than 30 places, or a change in age range. Academy trusts are required to undertake a fair and open local consultation on any significant changes they are proposing, prior to submitting proposals to the department.

The consultation is a key part of the process and allows both proposers and decision makers to take on board the views of those affected by any proposed change. The

department expects a wide range of stakeholders to be consulted, including the local authority, parents in the area and other schools and providers in the area. We expect all academy trusts to work collaboratively with local authorities and other local partners on place planning matters.

This is why, in the King's Speech, the government committed to legislating on requiring all schools to cooperate with their local authorities on issues such as admissions and place planning.

■ Academies: South Basildon and East Thurrock

James McMurdock:

[\[16427\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help ensure a smooth transition of schools from the Ortu Federation to the Mossbourne Federation in the South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

Catherine McKinnell:

Departmental officials have worked closely with the Ortu Federation and Mossbourne Federation since the decision was taken to transfer the schools.

As well as supporting both trusts to complete the necessary legal and financial processes, the department has agreed a funding package that will enable significant capital investment in the school buildings.

Mossbourne Federation has provided leadership support in the schools since the start of the year and is well placed to ensure pupils at these three schools achieve and thrive.

■ Academies: Staff

James McMurdock:

[\[16429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help academy schools under financial pressures handle the potential loss of experienced staff; and what support her Department offers staff facing possible redundancy.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department supports academy trusts to have the capability to manage their resources effectively by providing high-quality advice, support and development to help schools protect against financial difficulty. Where academy trusts are experiencing significant financial difficulty, the department engages supportively to provide practical advice and guidance.

A key element of the department's support are School Resource Management Advisers (SRMAs), practising sector experts such as school business professionals that work collaboratively with schools and trusts. SRMAs provide independent, expert and tailored advice to trusts on how they should make best use of their resources to deliver the best possible educational outcomes for their pupils. This support is for the whole sector and SRMAs have completed more than 2,000 visits to schools, trusts

and local authorities, with 92% of survey respondents rating their experience of an SRMA as good or very good.

High-quality teaching is the factor that makes the biggest difference to a child's education. This is why we will recruit 6,500 new expert teachers. We will get more teachers into shortage subjects, support areas that face recruitment challenges, and tackle retention issues. There are now 468,693 full-time equivalent teachers in state-funded schools in England. The department's initiatives are aimed not only at increasing teacher recruitment in key subjects and areas, but also at ensuring teachers stay and thrive in the profession.

■ Academies: Standards

James McMurdock:

[16422]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what measures are in place to support academy schools rated as (a) inadequate and (b) requires improvement by Ofsted in tackling problems related to (i) leadership, (ii) the curriculum and (iii) student outcomes.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department is focused on driving high and rising standards across all our schools, with a particular focus on those judged to be in need of additional support and intervention.

The School Improvement Offer provides ten days of support from a system leader to help the leadership team review a school's improvement plan and ensure actions are in place to rapidly improve the education and experience of children. Full details can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/trust-and-school-improvement-offer>.

The School Improvement Offer is available for schools of concern to Ofsted and those which were previously judged below 'good' and subsequently receive a requires improvement sub-judgement in either leadership and management or quality of education between September 2024 and February 2025.

The department also provides support through a range of curriculum hubs which offer support and training to help schools enhance their curriculum planning and implementation. These can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-support-from-school-hubs/subject-hubs>.

In addition, attendance and behaviour hubs have been introduced to support schools in developing effective whole-school cultures that promote excellent attendance and behaviour, which are important factors in improving student outcomes. Attendance hubs can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/attendance-hubs>. Information on behaviour hubs is available at: <https://behaviourhubs.co.uk/>.

The department's suite of National Professional Qualifications are designed to support school leaders to develop their skills across a range of areas, including leadership skills, pedagogy, behaviour management and setting culture, with the aim to improve school outcomes.

Where necessary, in cases of the most serious concern, the government will continue to intervene and transfer schools to new management, including by issuing an academy order. Guidance on governmental support and intervention in schools can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-causing-concern--2>.

From early 2025, new Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) teams will support all state schools by facilitating networking, sharing best practice and empowering schools to feel they can better access these supports and learn from one another. For schools requiring more intensive support, RISE teams and supporting organisations will work collaboratively with their responsible body to agree bespoke packages of targeted support, based on a school's particular circumstances.

Further information on support for schools, including those previously judged by Ofsted as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-improvement-support>.

James McMurdock:

[16431]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance her Department issues academy trusts on implementing uniform policies.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department publishes non-statutory guidance for all publicly funded schools, including academies, to support them in developing and implementing their school uniform policy. It covers a range of issues relating to uniform including supporting schools in meeting their obligations under equalities legislation. The guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform/school-uniforms>.

In addition, schools and their governing boards must have regard to statutory guidance on the cost of school uniforms, also issued by the department. The guidance outlines the cost considerations which schools should consider when developing uniform policies and managing their uniform supplier arrangements. It is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms>.

However, the government knows that too many families still struggle with the costs of school uniform. That's why in the Kings Speech the new government legislated to go further and cut the cost of uniforms for families, by legislating to limit the number of branded items of uniform and physical education kits that a school can require. The statutory guidance will be updated to reflect this limit at the appropriate time.

■ Apprentices

Neil Coyle:

[16484]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Transport, (b) rail operators, (c) regional mayors and (d) Transport

for London on ensuring that apprenticeships are open to young people wherever they live.

Janet Daby:

This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity and we want to rebalance opportunities towards young people, who have the most to gain from apprenticeships but who too often have been locked out of accessing these opportunities. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education held a recent roundtable with Regional Mayors which included discussions on how we can work together more closely to boost opportunities for young people. The department and Skills England will continue to have discussions with the Department for Transport and its stakeholders.

This government'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. This will help more people learn new high-quality skills at work, and fuel innovation in businesses across the UK. 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 support clear pathways and progression in work-based training and employment.

The department provides employers and apprenticeship providers with additional funding to support more apprenticeship opportunities. The department provides two payments of £500 to employers and providers when they take on apprentices aged 16 to 18, and up to age 24 for apprentices with an education, health and care plan or who have been in local authority care. These payments are used in many cases to support costs such as work equipment, uniforms or travel.

Apprentices may also be eligible for local discounted travel schemes. For example, apprentices over 18, living in a London borough and in the first year of an apprenticeship can get discounted travel with an Oyster photocard.

Apprentices aged under 25 who have been in local authority care may be eligible for a £3,000 bursary, as well as wages from their employer. The bursary is not subject to tax and is not treated as income for benefits purposes.

The department is also continuing to promote apprenticeships in schools and colleges through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme as well as targeting young people through the 'Skills for Life' campaign.

■ **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Drugs**

Jim Shannon:

[\[16164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she made with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of ADHD medication shortages on the attendance of young people at school.

Stephen Morgan:

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

The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) has been working hard with industry to help resolve supply issues with some attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medicines, which are affecting the United Kingdom and other countries around the world.

As a result of intensive work, some issues have been resolved, and all strengths of lisdexamfetamine, atomoxetine capsules and guanfacine prolonged-release tablets are now available. DHSC is continuing to work to resolve supply issues, where they remain, for methylphenidate prolonged-release tablets. They are engaging with all suppliers to assess the challenges faced and the action taken to address them.

DHSC are also directing suppliers to secure additional stocks, expedite deliveries where possible and review plans to further build capacity to support continued growth in demand for the short and long term. Supplies in the UK are expected to improve throughout the rest of 2024. However, DHSC anticipates supply to be limited for some strengths and we continue to work with all suppliers to ensure the remaining issues are resolved as soon as possible.

Departmental guidance sets clear expectations to schools, trusts and local authorities to provide a 'support-first' approach to school attendance. This guidance can be accessed at:

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

The department knows that some pupils face more complex barriers to attendance, including pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Their right to an education is the same as any other pupil and therefore the attendance ambition for these pupils should be the same as it is for any other pupil. However, additional support may need to be provided to deliver those ambitions.

For pupils with SEND, schools are expected to work closely with parents to develop tailored support strategies and ensure pupils receive the provisions in their education, health and care plans. This includes implementing strategies to remove in-school barriers, such as considering reasonable adjustments to uniform, routines, lunchtime arrangements and access to support.

■ Curriculum**James McMurdock:****[16434]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure students have access to a broad curriculum that supports diverse career pathways, especially in schools undergoing staffing reductions.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE.

The review will seek to deliver an excellent foundation in core subjects of reading, writing and maths, alongside a broader curriculum, so that children and young people do not miss out on subjects such as music, art, sport and drama, as well as vocational subjects.

It will also seek to deliver a curriculum that ensures children and young people leave compulsory education ready for life and ready for work, building the knowledge, skills and attributes young people need to thrive.

The review is taking place in the context of an education system facing considerable challenges and staff shortages. It will recognise and seek to account for these issues when considering how a broad curriculum can be delivered. The Terms of Reference for the review can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d196b7d107658faec7e3db/Curriculum_and_assessment_review_-_aims_terms_of_reference_and_working_principles.pdf.

The department has announced its intention to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers and to encourage more teachers into shortage subjects, support areas that face recruitment challenges, and tackle retention issues.

English Language: Education**Rupert Lowe:****[16356]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of people who took an English for Speakers of Other Languages class claimed Universal Credit in the last 12 months; and what the cost to the public purse was of the provision of those classes in the same period.

Janet Daby:

The information requested is not held centrally and is therefore not readily available.

The department does hold data on the number of people who took an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualification, but this only includes learners funded through the adult skills fund (ASF), therefore excluding learners in devolved areas and those who studied ESOL courses funded through tailored learning. In 2023/24 145,730 people studied an ESOL qualification funded through the ASF.

First Aid: Curriculum**Tom Morrison:****[16255]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of making first aid a mandatory part of the national curriculum.

Catherine McKinnell:

I refer the hon. Member for Cheadle to the answer of 5 November 2024 to Question [11341](#).

■ Foster Care: Pay**Jess Asato:****[16577]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a statutory minimum fee framework for foster carers.

Janet Daby:

I pay tribute to the vital efforts of foster carers, who carry out a challenging role that requires skill, dedication and love. Our policy statement, 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive' sets out our plans to recruit and retain more foster carers and provide access to support for both kinship and foster carers. This statement can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67375fe5ed0fc07b53499a42/Keeping_Children_Safe_Helping_Families_Thrive_.pdf

This government has also confirmed its commitment to further reforms to children's social care in the future. As part of these reforms, the department will consider how it can further support foster carers and ensure that more children receive loving care in foster families. However, there are no current plans to introduce a statutory minimum fee framework for foster carers.

Fostering service providers, including local authorities, have the flexibility to pay additional fees. Decisions to pay fees are therefore made independently by the fostering service provider. The department encourages all fostering service providers to regularly review the fees they pay to their foster carers to ensure they remain appropriate.

All foster carers should receive at least the National Minimum Allowance (NMA), to cover the costs of raising an extra child in their home. The NMA has been uplifted by 3.55% for the 2025/26 financial year

If any foster carers receive less than the NMA, they should discuss this with their fostering service and use their complaints procedure if necessary. If the issue is not resolved, it can be escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, who has assured the department that these cases will be considered and dealt with appropriately.

■ Further Education: Pay**Will Stone:****[16363]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the 5.5% pay award for teachers in academized sixth forms to non-academized colleges.

Janet Daby:

Unlike 16-19 academies, sixth form colleges are part of the statutory further education (FE) sector.

The department does not set or recommend pay in FE providers, which have the freedom to make their own arrangements in line with their local circumstances.

We recognise the vital role that FE teachers and providers play in equipping learners with the opportunities and skills that they need to succeed in their education.

The October Budget set out the government's commitment to skills, by providing an additional £300 million revenue funding for FE to ensure young people are developing the skills this country needs. The department will set out in due course how this funding will be distributed.

■ Guardianship and Parents: Prisoners**Mr Richard Holden:**[\[16525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to collate a national register of pupils with (a) parents and (b) primary carers in prison.

Janet Daby:

The department knows growing up with a parent or primary carer in prison can have a devastating impact on a child's life chances. The government has a key mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child, which is why the department has committed to identifying children of prisoners and ensuring they get the support they need to thrive.

The department acknowledges the complexities of this issue and the wide range of family circumstances there may be. We must consider the implications the imprisonment of a child's primary carer has on the child, regardless of whether they have legal responsibility for the child and/or are a blood relative. This is why the Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) programme report, published by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in July this year, used multiple data sources to capture the breadth of parental relationships.

The MoJ is leading on the work to better identify children with a parent or primary carer in prison. At present, alongside the department, the MoJ is working to determine how to effectively identify these children so they are provided with the support they need to thrive. Parental imprisonment is a sensitive issue, and we are working with a range of stakeholders to ensure this is handled in the most child-centred, trauma-informed and age-appropriate way. Exact details of how this will work in practice are to be confirmed.

The department will make sure it considers how best to support all children affected by this issue as part of its wider reforms to children's social care. We are clear that the support these children receive should be based on their individual needs, not solely the characteristic of having a parent or primary carer in prison.

■ Pupils: Poverty

Ms Julie Minns:

[16296]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of the number of pupils that have experienced hygiene poverty in each of the last five years.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government is committed to tackling child poverty as part of our mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child.

Child poverty has gone up by 700,000 since 2010, with over four million children now growing up in a low-income family. This not only harms children's lives now, but it also damages their future prospects and holds back our society and economy.

The Child Poverty Taskforce recognises families' ability to afford essentials, including hygiene essentials, as a fundamental aspect of child poverty. Addressing acute poverty, including access to essentials, is a core focus of the work being developed through the Child Poverty Strategy. This is set out in more detail in the 23 October publication 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing our Strategy', which can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-child-poverty-developing-our-strategy>.

■ School Libraries

Andrew Cooper:

[17038]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including information about school libraries in the school census return.

Stephen Morgan:

The department has no current plans to collect any specific data about school libraries in the school census.

The school census is the department's primary source of administrative data about pupils attending schools in England. We keep the content of all our data collections, including the school census, under review to ensure that the data we collect is necessary, feasible and minimises the data collection burden placed on the sector.

■ Secondary Education: Slough

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese:

[16181]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average staff to student ratio was in secondary schools in Slough constituency in each year since 2015.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on the school workforce, including the pupil to adult and pupil to teacher ratios at national, regional, local authority and individual school level, is published in the 'School Workforce in England' statistical publication, found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

In the 2023/24 academic year, which is the latest data available, the ratio of pupils to teachers (qualified and unqualified) was 16.8 in state-funded secondary schools in England, the same as the previous year. The ratio of pupils to adults (excluding auxiliary staff) was 12.0 to one in state-funded secondary schools in England, again the same as the previous year.

The attached table provides the pupil to adult ratio and the pupil to teacher ratio for state-funded secondary schools in Slough constituency and England for the 2015/16 to 2023/24 academic years.

Attachments:

1. Attachment_Pupil_Teacher_Adult_Ratios
[16181_attachment_pupil_teacher_adult_ratio.xls]

■ **Special Educational Needs: Finance**

James Wild:

[\[16325\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 26 November 2024 to Question 14758 on Special Educational Needs: Finance, and with reference to Table 5.1 in the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, on what evidential basis item 62, page 121, entitled Special Education Needs and Disabilities: Reduction in Local Authority SEND deficits as a result of additional DEL funding specifies £865 million of spending in 2025-26.

Catherine McKinnell:

The Office for Budget Responsibility had forecast that local authorities would spend £1.4 billion more than the funding they would receive on high needs in the 2025/26 financial year. This was on the assumption that high needs funding would increase only by the gross domestic product (GDP) deflator. In fact, overall high needs funding increased by £1 billion, and given this higher level of funding, HM Treasury have recorded in their tables that this creates a corresponding £865 million reduction in expected local government spending on high needs (that is, in the level of local government spending over the funding they will receive).

■ **Turing Scheme: Free School Meals**

Chi Onwurah:

[\[16154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of (a) schools and (b) students with Turing grants receive free school meals.

Chi Onwurah:

[\[16156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of students with Turing grants who are eligible for free school meals attend an independent school.

Janet Daby:

The Turing Scheme is the UK Government's global programme for students to study and work abroad. The Turing Scheme provides additional funding to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to help them to participate in international placements.

All students from disadvantaged backgrounds can get funding for travel-related costs. This includes visa application fees, vaccines, medical certificates, passports, and related travel insurance. Students with special educational needs and disabilities can also get funding for their support needs.

Schools identify students from a disadvantaged background using the following criteria:

- Someone with an annual household income of £25,000 or less.
- Someone who has been entitled to free school meals (FSM) at any point in the past six years because of being in a low-income household.
- Someone with experience of being in care or who is a care leaver, including anyone who is or has been in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life.
- A refugee or an asylum seeker.
- Someone who is receiving Universal Credit or income related benefits themselves, or lives with someone who does.

Receiving FSM in reception, year 1 and year 2 in England or primary 1 to 5 in Scotland does not automatically meet the criteria for funding for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This list is not exhaustive. If a school identifies pupils who do not precisely meet these criteria but share similar characteristics which justify extra support, they may include them in their application.

As the department does not gather data on which criteria students meet to be considered as being from a disadvantaged background, the department is not able to provide a breakdown of the number of participants in the Turing Scheme who are in receipt of FSM.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Aquind: Electricity Interconnectors

Amanda Martin:

[\[16872\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Ministry of Defence and (b) OFGEM on the AQUIND Interconnector project.

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.

■ Biofuels: Electricity Generation

Tom Hayes:

[16395]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how much biomass electricity generation contributes to the UK's carbon footprint.

Michael Shanks:

Government considers the use of sustainable biomass for electricity generation to be low carbon. This assessment takes into account emissions attributed to biomass from across the supply chain.

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero publishes territorial emissions estimates, found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-territorial-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics>. However, international reporting guidelines, established by organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), require carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from the combustion of biomass to be accounted for in the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector rather than the energy sector. Correspondingly, CO₂ emissions from the use of imported biomass are accounted for in the LULUCF sectors across the national inventories in which the biomass was harvested.

■ British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme

Michelle Welsh:

[17062]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what is his Department's planned timescale for the review of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme.

Sarah Jones:

The Government is committed to ending the injustice of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme and the first increased payments due to the transfer of the Investment Reserve Fund to members were made at the end of November. The Government will soon start talks with the MPS Trustees on the future arrangements for surplus sharing.

The Government is happy to consider any proposals for changes that the BCSSS Trustees wish to make once the new MPS arrangements have been agreed.

■ Business: Energy

Tom Hayes:

[16675]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment he has made of the the use of energy monitoring systems by businesses to accelerate their progress towards net zero.

Sarah Jones:

The use of energy monitoring systems can support all types and sizes of business to better understand their energy consumption. It can assist large businesses and their corporate groups to carry out mandatory energy assessments of their buildings, transport and industrial processes under the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme, to

enable the identification of costed energy saving measures. ESOS participants are required to disclose their total energy use, and submit action plans and progress updates on any energy saving measures they decide to implement following their assessment. Businesses that are also in scope of Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting can also set out in their annual reports the key energy efficiency actions they have taken alongside the required energy and emissions disclosures.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Aviation

Rupert Lowe: [\[16320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many (a) air miles and (b) flights he has completed since 5 July 2024.

Michael Shanks:

Data on minister's overseas travel and on senior civil servant's business expenses is published on a quarterly basis. This can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/desnz-ministerial-gifts-hospitality-travel-meetings-april-to-june-2024>

■ Electric Cables: Countryside and Forests

James McMurdock: [\[16412\]](#)

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 (a) green spaces and (b) ancient woodlands.

James McMurdock: [\[16414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of electricity pylons on wildlife.

Michael Shanks:

Developers of electricity transmission projects and all nationally significant infrastructure projects in England and Wales must assess the impacts of their proposals. This includes conducting assessments of projects' impacts on the environment and habitats through Environmental Impact Assessments and Habitats Regulations Assessments. Additionally, developers engage with statutory and non-statutory stakeholders through consultations to ensure their feedback is considered in project proposals. All of this is considered in the independent and robust project assessment process.

■ Electricity Generation

Tom Hayes: [\[16392\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the quantity of natural gas reserves required to (a) maintain variable electricity generation and (b) meet electricity demand.

Michael Shanks:

To ensure security of supply, the electricity system requires generating capacity that can dispatch power in the event of high peak demand, unexpected outage or during periods of low renewable output. As we transition to clean power the government will work with the private sector to ensure flexible technologies such as hydrogen, long duration electricity storage and power with carbon capture and storage are deployed.

Unabated gas will increasingly move to a backup role as low carbon alternatives deploy. We will continue to develop our strategy to enable a transition away from unabated gas whilst maintaining security of supply.

Electricity: Imports**Tom Hayes:**[\[16390\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to reduce the UK's dependence on imported electricity.

Michael Shanks:

The Government's upcoming Clean Power 2030 action plan will detail the Government's strategy protect people from increased energy bills caused by volatile global gas markets and accelerate our pathway towards greater energy independence through the deployment of clean energy.

Importing cheaper electricity during peak times reduces the need to turn on carbon-intensive domestic generation and can enhance security of supply by providing access to a more diverse generation pool that complements our domestic energy mix.

Insulation: Housing**Shaun Davies:**[\[16277\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to improve public (a) awareness of and (b) access to loft insulation protection to improve energy efficiency.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

There are several Government schemes offering loft insulation as a measure to improve energy efficiency. The Government's retrofitting tool 'find ways to save energy in your home' (<https://www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency>), provides tailored guidance to help consumers make their homes greener and cheaper to run.

All businesses under Government schemes and initiatives must be TrustMark registered. These businesses must be certified to Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 2030 and follow PAS 2035 standards. TrustMark's role under Government schemes is to ensure compliance with the overarching PAS 2035 process, setting clear requirements to protect consumer.

■ Liquefied Petroleum Gas: Prices

David Chadwick:

[16420]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to protect liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) customers from (a) market volatility surcharges and (b) fees to remove LPG tanks once a contract has finished.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Government does not currently plan to introduce legislative proposals to protect liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) customers from market volatility surcharges or tank removal fees. But we will continue monitoring the market and industry practices to ensure that it is delivering for consumers.

The Government remains committed to ensuring a competitive market protect consumers. Existing consumer protection laws provide safeguards, including the LPG market orders administered by the Competition and Markets Authority. A guide to their operation, including who to complain to, is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/liquefied-petroleum-gas-lpg-market-orders-and-calculator>.

■ National Grid: East of England

James McMurdock:

[16415]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent discussions his Department has had with National Grid about the estimated cost of the Norwich-to-Tilbury pylon project.

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.

■ Warm Home Discount Scheme

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[16409]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Warm Home Discount to include all disabled members of an eligible household.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Warm Home Discount currently focuses support towards those on lowest incomes who receive means-tested benefits and living in a property estimated to be relatively high cost to heat. The eligibility criteria are set to make best use of the data available to identify households at greatest risk of fuel poverty. This winter's scheme opened on 14 October, and we expect it to support over three million households. We are exploring options to improve the design of the scheme beyond the current regulations which expire in 2026.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ African Swine Fever**

Sir Alec Shelbrooke: [\[16730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the (a) likelihood of an African Swine Fever outbreak in the UK and (b) potential economic impact of such an outbreak.

Daniel Zeichner:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Epping Forest on 28 October 2024, to Question [10798](#).

■ African Swine Fever: Disease Control

Patrick Spencer: [\[12666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with reference to his Department's guidance entitled African swine fever: how to spot and report the disease, updated on 27 September 2024, whether he plans to ban all personal imports of (a) pork and (b) pork products.

Daniel Zeichner:

Preventing an outbreak of African swine fever in the UK is one of Defra's key biosecurity priorities. The Department keeps policy on personal imports under constant review and works closely with the devolved governments on contingency planning and preventing an incursion from possibly infected goods.

We have already strengthened controls on personal imports of pork and pork products from the EU through the measures we introduced in September. We are working to develop a long-term policy on personal imports of products of animal origin and animal by-products, taking account of international examples.

■ Agricultural Products: UK Trade with EU

Stephen Gethins: [\[15757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the UK leaving the EU (a) Single Market and (b) Customs Union on the export of agri-food products from the UK to the EU.

Daniel Zeichner:

This Government cares deeply about the trading relationship with the European Union; The Withdrawal Agreement, including the Windsor Framework, and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) underpin relations between the UK and the EU. Although the TCA allows zero tariffs and zero quota trade, leaving the EU Single Market and Customs Union had an impact on the export of agri-food products, as have other changes in trade policy such as new Free Trade Agreements with other countries, and global shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are working to reset our relationship with our European friends to strengthen ties and tackle barriers to UK-EU trade. We will seek to negotiate a veterinary/SPS agreement to boost trade and deliver benefits to businesses and consumers in the UK and the EU. We have been clear that our trading relationship can be improved but we are not rejoining the single market or customs union, and we will not return to freedom of movement.

■ Agriculture

Ian Roome:

[\[16623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps she is taking to support family farmers.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government's commitment to British farmers, including family farms, remains steadfast. We will always champion British farming to boost rural economic growth, strengthen food security and improve the environment.

In the Budget announced last month, the Government committed £5 billion to the farming budget over two years, including more money than ever for sustainable food production: £1.8 billion for environmental land management schemes in 2025/26. This enables us to keep momentum on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector.

We're also optimising our farming schemes, so they work efficiently for all farmers, food security and the environment, especially for those that are too often ignored such as small, grassland, upland and tenanted farms.

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Helen Grant:

[\[14454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) farmers and (b) landowners on the proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief.

Daniel Zeichner:

We are listening to the sector to ensure their views are heard. We have met with a range of farming stakeholders over the past weeks, including the National Farmers Union (NFU), the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), and the Tenant Farmers Association (TFA), and has meetings planned with trade associations in the coming weeks.

The Secretary of State Steve Reed met with NFU President Tom Bradshaw to clarify changes in the Budget. We have also met with NFU, TFA and CLA representatives and recently attended the Eggs and Poultry Industry Conference as part of ongoing engagement with the sector.

The Secretary of State spoke at the CLA's annual conference on 21 November to hear from farmers directly. His speech can be found [here](#).

Minister Zeichner recently attended and spoke at Northern Farming Conference, the Eggs and Poultry Industry Conference, the Agricultural Industries Confederation Conference, The Tenant Farmers Association Executive Committee and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution's parliamentary reception.

We will continue to listen to farmers' concerns to ensure their views are heard.

■ Agriculture: Land

Steve Barclay:

[12074]

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

Daniel Zeichner:

The Defra June Survey of Agriculture has statistical estimates of the English farmland areas at local authority level, the latest available is for 2021. Please note this survey only covers commercial holdings (defined as farms with more than five hectares of agricultural land, one hectare of orchards, 0.5 hectares of vegetables, 0.1 hectares of protected crops, 10 cows, 50 pigs, 20 sheep, 20 goats or 1,000 poultry).

Defra produces statistical estimates of the total income from farming by English county. Data are only available on total fixed capital (value of land, plant and buildings) at UK level due to the calculation methodology used.

Defra do not hold financial data for farms at holding level. Some financial information is published at a farm business level (where multiple farm holdings can constitute a single farm business). This information is based on the Farm Business Survey which only covers farm businesses in England with a Standard Output of more than £21,000. Whilst the Survey captures the majority of agricultural activity, it excludes around 43,000 smaller businesses (which account for 2% of output). This means the statistics cannot be used to infer any statistical estimates for the whole population of farms. The published 2022/23 balance sheet statistics, which include the distribution of farms by net worth by region, are available in Table 6 of the Balance Sheets.

Please note that the data being asked for is already publicly available on the Defra Farming Statistics webpages: [Food, Farming and Bio-security statistics - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/food-farming-and-bio-security-statistics)

■ Agriculture: Subsidies

Tim Farron:

[14282]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of changes in the levels of subsidies for farmers in the next two years.

Tim Farron:

[14283]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent estimate he has made of changes in levels of subsidies for farmers since 5 July 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

In October, the Government announced that it intends to accelerate the end of the era of payouts to large and wealthy landowners simply for owning land. The fastest reductions in subsidies will be to those who historically received the largest payments. For 2025 delinked payments, we plan to apply a 76% reduction to the first £30,000 of a payment, while making no payments for any portion of a payment above £30,000.

On farm support more broadly, the Government has committed to support farmers through a farming budget of £5 billion over two years, including £2.4 billion in 2025/26.

Phasing out delinked payments will allow us to focus more of this funding on Environmental Land Management schemes.

The farming budget for future years will be agreed as part of phase 2 of the Spending Review.

■ Animal Welfare: Import Controls**Sam Carling:**[\[16841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to prevent imports of animals with harmful mutilations.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government recently announced its support for the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill, a Private Members' Bill sponsored by Dr Danny Chambers MP. The Bill will give the Government powers to prevent the supply of low-welfare pets to Great Britain's pet market. We will use these powers to prohibit the bringing into Great Britain of dogs and cats with non-exempted mutilations such as cropping ears, docking tails and declawing.

We are fully supportive of this Bill and would like to see it pass through both Houses as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

■ Cats and Dogs: Animal Breeding**Sam Carling:**[\[16842\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to prevent the breeding of (a) cats and (b) dogs with exaggerated characteristics.

Daniel Zeichner:

Under The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018, licensed dog breeders and pet sellers, who breed and sell puppies and kittens, must meet and maintain strict license conditions designed to protect their animals from pain, suffering, injury and illness.

Licensed dog breeders are prohibited from breeding dogs if it can be reasonably expected that on the basis of their genotype, phenotype or health, this would lead to welfare problems for the mother or the puppies.

Defra provides a national communications campaign (Petfished) to help consumers to make well-informed choices. The campaign's step-by-step guide on buying a dog includes a reminder to ensure that the dog's physical features have minimal adverse impacts on their physical well-being and welfare.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Complaints

Rupert Lowe: [\[12206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many complaints to his Department from farmers there were in each of the last five years.

Daniel Zeichner:

Records of complaints categorised by the occupation of the complainant are not held by the department. Obtaining the information would incur disproportionate costs.

■ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Motor Vehicles

Mr Toby Perkins: [\[12933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many (a) petrol, (b) diesel, (c) hybrid and (d) electric (i) cars, (ii) vans and (iii) other vehicles his Department hired in each of the last five years.

Daniel Zeichner:

The data for Defra has been provided by our supplier of hire cars "Enterprise".

Data from Enterprise shows the following:

Hires:

FUEL	NO OF HIRES
Petrol	5,171
Diesel	660
EV/Hybrid	174

Due to time constraints, we have only engaged with our main vehicle hire suppliers and not where vehicle hire will be supplied as a supplementary service on other contracts, i.e. Welfare Vans through the Plant Hire framework.

■ Dogs: Smuggling

Mike Amesbury: [\[16791\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent estimate he has made of the number of pregnant dogs illegally smuggled into the UK in the last three years.

Daniel Zeichner:

By its very nature, robust data on the full extent of illegal pet smuggling is not readily available. Therefore, the number of pregnant dogs illegally smuggled into the UK is difficult to quantify accurately.

Farmers and Food: Finance**Stuart Anderson:**[\[16538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Treasury on the potential merits of increasing funding to help (a) farmers and (b) food producers.

Daniel Zeichner:

This Government's commitment to farmers and food producers remains steadfast. Labour will always champion British farming to boost rural economic growth, strengthen food security and improve the environment.

Defra has £5 billion for the farming budget over two years. This will include the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history: £1.8 billion for environmental land management schemes. This enables us to keep momentum on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector, with the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery all continuing. This funding will deliver improvements to food security as well as the environment.

Farms: Economic Situation**Samantha Niblett:**[\[16625\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of (a) small and (b) medium farms on the economy of (i) Derbyshire and (ii) the UK.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra does not produce estimates of the economic contribution of farming by farm size. Total income from farming in the UK in 2023 was £7.2 billion.

Regional estimates are produced at international territorial levels (ITL) 1, 2 and 3, with ITL3 being the most granular geographical breakdown. In 2023, total income from farming for the three Derbyshire ITL3 regions was £0.13 million for Derby, £11.84 million for East Derbyshire and £36.69 million for South and West Derbyshire.

Full details are available here: [Total income from farming in the UK - GOV.UK](#)

[Total income from farming for the regions of England - GOV.UK](#).

Flood Control: Cambridgeshire**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[16252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what Cambridgeshire's allocation under the flood funding formula is for 2024-25.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) has allocated over £13 million of funding across the Cambridgeshire area in 2024/25. Alongside this investment, the EA is working in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council to support over 30 local flood action groups across the county to effectively respond to and improve their resilience to flooding.

The Government inherited flood assets in their worst condition on record following years of underinvestment by the previous government – 92.1% of the EA's 38,000 high consequence assets are currently at required condition.

■ Floods: North West**Mike Amesbury:**[\[16786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential flood risks to (a) Runcorn and Helsby constituency and (b) the North West.

Emma Hardy:

Flood and coastal risk management investment takes place where the risk is highest, wherever it is across the country.

The Environment Agency (EA) publishes the National Flood Risk Assessment (NaFRA), an assessment of flood risk from rivers and the sea for all areas of England and Wales, produced using local data and expertise. It shows the probability of flooding from rivers and the sea, considering flood defences and the condition they are in. This information is presented in flood risk likelihood categories.

The northwest of England (the Environment Agency areas of Cumbria and Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire) benefited from £97 million of investment between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 from the current Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) programme, resulting in 3270 properties being better protected from the risk of flooding.

■ Import Controls**Sir Alec Shelbrooke:**[\[16733\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the (a) effectiveness of the new Border Target Operating Model and (b) threat of its use as a route to illegally import products of animal origin.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra has made additional funding of £1.9 million available to Dover District Council for the Port Health Authority, for the remainder of this financial year (2024 to 2025), to support Border Force to conduct safeguarding checks on the illegal import of products of animal origin. This is in addition to the £1.2 million already committed. This total funding of £3.1m million is based on the existing staffing costs provided by Dover Port Health Authority. This funding is only for this financial year. Defra has also contributed operational equipment to support Border Force with relevant checks.

■ Inland Border Facilities: Ashford

Clive Jones:

[\[15563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2024 to Question 11480 on Import Controls: Fees and Charges, when he plans to make available further information on the (a) charge and (b) operating costs at Sevington.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government plans to publish this information in Spring 2025.

■ Internal Drainage Boards: Finance

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how much funding his Department planned to provide to drainage boards [for the 2024-25 financial year] on (a) 1 July 2024 and (b) 20 November 2024.

Emma Hardy:

Internal drainage boards (IDBs) are independent statutory public bodies that are locally funded. As a matter of course they are not funded by the Government but can apply for government grants to deliver specific outcomes. For example, funding under the government's flood investment programme to deliver flood risk defences.

Defra is providing a one-off £75 million IDB Fund, to accelerate IDBs' recovery from the winter 2023-24 storms and to provide opportunities to modernise and upgrade assets. This funding will support greater resilience for farmers and rural communities in the long term.

Under the previous Government, Defra planned to provide all the IDB Fund grants in 2024-25 and the IDBs would have to deliver their projects by 31 March 2025. The Government took the decision to extend the IDB Fund into 2025-26.

■ Pets: Animal Welfare

Sam Carling:

[\[16860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle irresponsible pet ownership.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is working hand in hand with the police, local authorities and animal welfare groups to encourage responsible dog ownership, make sure dog control issues are addressed before they escalate and that the full force of the law is applied.

■ Pigmeat: Imports

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[15408\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to require imported pork to meet the UK's animal welfare standards.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government shares the public's high regard for the UK's environmental protections, food standards and animal welfare and recognises farmers' concerns about imports produced using methods not permitted in the UK. We have been clear that we will use our Trade Strategy to promote the highest food production standards.

All pork imported into the UK must meet standards at least equivalent to the key requirements set out in the protection of animals at the time of killing legislation.

■ Rural England Prosperity Fund

Stuart Anderson: [\[16773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential impact of extending the Rural England Prosperity Fund on (a) small business, (b) farmers and (c) community infrastructure.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) is intended to support new and existing rural businesses, including farm businesses, to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy and to support new and improved community infrastructure that will provide essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy.

An evaluation of REPF is underway and will report in Spring 2025.

■ Vegetarian Society

Dr Neil Hudson: [\[14476\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will publish the speech made by the Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs at the Vegetarian Society event on 13 November 2024.

Daniel Zeichner:

Minister Zeichner spoke briefly at this reception. This is something he often does at similar events. Defra does not routinely publish transcripts of such remarks and there are no plans to deviate from convention.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant: Arrest Warrants****Paula Barker:**[\[15524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will reaffirm support for the International Criminal Court; and if he will publish an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the arrest warrants issued by that Court for (a) Benjamin Netanyahu and (b) Yoav Gallant.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We confirm our support and respect for the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Whilst we do not have plans to publish an assessment, we remain focused on pushing for an immediate ceasefire, to bring an end to the devastating violence in Gaza. This is essential to ensure the release of hostages, the upholding of international law and to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Paula Barker:[\[15525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to help ensure the (a) arrest and (b) surrender to the International Criminal Court of (i) Benjamin Netanyahu and (ii) Yoav Gallant.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The issue of enforcing an arrest warrant would only arise if the indicted individual were to visit the UK. There is a domestic legal process set out in the ICC Act 2001 which would be followed in such a situation.

■ Benjamin Netanyahu: Arrest Warrants**Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[15666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to the International Criminal Court condemning their decision to issue an arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

In line with this Government's stated commitment to the rule of law, we respect the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

■ Canada: Religious Hatred**Jim Shannon:**[\[16166\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Canadian counterpart on taking steps to help tackle religious hate crimes towards Jewish communities in that country.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK and Canada are close partners and friends. The Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister Joly engage regularly on a wide range of topics. They last spoke on 25 November. I briefly met Minister Joly in the margins of the NATO Foreign

Ministers' meeting on 3 December. The UK will continue to work with its partners to tackle all forms of extremism to ensure the safety of our communities. We are clear that incitement of violence or hatred against individuals based on their religion or belief is unacceptable.

■ Developing Countries: Education

Helen Grant:

[\[16142\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps are being taken to prioritise Official Development Assistance aid for education in (a) countries where (i) literacy and (ii) numeracy rates are lowest and (b) protracted crisis settings.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK Government prioritises reaching the most marginalised children with basic literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills, including through our 18 bilateral education programmes. Our centrally managed Scaling Access and Learning in Education and Data for Foundational Learning programmes will also transform the effectiveness of education spending in low- and lower middle-income countries and improve learning outcomes on literacy and numeracy. Our investment in the International Finance Facility for Education will unlock an additional \$1 billion in education finance for lower middle-income country governments to invest in their reform agendas.

The UK is a top bilateral donor to the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait (ECW), both global funds delivering education in crisis settings. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary announced a doubling of UK aid for Sudan and neighbouring countries, including support for ECW to provide safe learning spaces and psychosocial support for 200,000 vulnerable children in refugee and host communities.

■ Diego Garcia: Military Bases

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the planned cost to the public purse is of leasing the military base in Diego Garcia from Mauritius.

Stephen Doughty:

It is not normal practice for the UK to confirm the value of its payments for military bases anywhere across the globe. Whilst the annual 'operating costs' of some bases and training areas may be shared, this is different to the value of payments for military bases. Confirming these costs could put secure operations at risk. Following Treaty signature, further details of the Treaty will be put before both Houses for scrutiny in the usual way.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Employers' Contributions

Priti Patel:

[\[16752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 22 November 2024 to Question 14335 on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff, if he will publish an estimate of the cost implications for his Department of the increase in employer National Insurance contributions for 2025/26.

Catherine West:

HM Treasury are assessing the impact of the National Insurance increase on the public sector in 2025/26 and will inform the Department of the support it will receive in due course.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Procurement

Priti Patel:

[\[16729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 22 November 2024 to Question 14335 on Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Staff, if he will make an estimate of the potential impact of changes to national insurance contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024 on costs to its suppliers; and if he will make an estimate of the potential impact of those costs on his Department's budget in the 2025-26 financial year.

Catherine West:

The Department does not hold the necessary information to estimate the potential impact on its thousands of suppliers. As previously indicated in the response to PQ 14336, the impact of tax changes would be taken into account along with all other changes to their cost base in the usual way through contract negotiations.

■ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance: Finance

Dan Tomlinson:

[\[16377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure continued funding for GAVI.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is one of the largest donors to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, committing £1.65 billion from 2021-2025. This funding supports their mission to immunise 300 million children and save up to 8 million lives from vaccine-preventable diseases over this period. The UK is working with international partners to ensure sustainable resources for the upcoming global health replenishments. These are being considered together to ensure we are best placed to deliver for the global health challenges ahead. Funding decisions will be taken following the conclusion of the Spending Review in 2025.

■ Gaza: Fire Services**Susan Murray:** [\[15685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with the Fire Brigades Union on the fire engine donated to Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK continues to call on Israel to increase humanitarian and commercial access into the Occupied Palestinian Territories by ensuring all aid crossings are fully operational, including the port of Ashdod. The Foreign Secretary recently spoke to Israeli Officials and raised the urgent need for a rapid increase in aid for those most in need. FCDO officials have raised the matter of this donation directly with the Israeli authorities and are working with colleagues in the Scottish Government to resolve the matter.

■ Gaza: Genocide Convention**Paula Barker:** [\[14341\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to fulfil its (a) duty to prevent and (b) other obligations under the Genocide Convention with respect to Gaza, with reference to (i) the International Court of Justice's order of provisional measures in South Africa v Israel (2023), (ii) paragraph 431 of the International Court of Justice's judgment in Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro (2007) and (iii) the Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (2001).

Paula Barker: [\[14342\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with international counterparts on the collective measures available to ensure the implementation of treaty obligations to prevent genocide and other atrocity crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

It is the UK's long-standing policy that any determination as to whether genocide has occurred is a matter for a competent national or international court, and not for governments or non-judicial bodies. This approach ensures that any determination is above politics, lobbying, and individual or national interest. The Government is clear in our commitment to international law. This includes our obligations under the Genocide Convention and the Arms Trade Treaty. This Government is profoundly concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary has raised our grave concerns with Israeli Minister Dermer and Minister Katz in his recent bilateral meetings. At a multilateral level, the UK is using its presidency of the United Nations Security Council, to call for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages held since 7 October 2023, and urgent action to address the humanitarian crisis. On 2 September 2024, the Foreign Secretary

announced the decision to suspend export licences for items that could be used in military operations in Gaza, exempting the F-35 components.

Richard Burgon: [\[15470\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations his Department has made to Israel about compliance with the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice in the case of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip .

Mr Hamish Falconer:

It is the UK Government's long-standing policy that any determination of genocide is a matter for a competent national or international court, and not for governments or non-judicial bodies. This approach ensures that any determination is above politics, lobbying and individual or national interest. The recent Provisional Measures Order was an interim order, intended to preserve the rights of the parties pending consideration of the legal arguments and evidence. The UK respects the independence of the International Court of Justice and awaits its decision.

■ **Gaza: Health Services**

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15680\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure the protection of healthcare workers in Gaza under international humanitarian law.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are deeply concerned by the reports that Israeli airstrikes have hit health facilities and killed and injured medical personnel. Medical workers and facilities, including ambulances, and rescue personnel must be protected in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and allowed to provide life-saving services. It is unacceptable that North Gaza now has no functioning hospitals after strikes on Kamal Adwan hospital. On 5 November, I raised the UK's grave concerns that Kamal Adwan continues to come under fire with the Israeli Ambassador. This Government has been clear that Israel must do much more to protect civilians, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian workers, including the medics Gaza so desperately needs.

■ **Gaza: Israel**

Kate Osamor: [\[14322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the matters raised in the Human Rights Watch report entitled Hopeless, Starving and Besieged: Israel's Forced Displacement of Palestinians in Gaza, published on 14 November 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We have not made an assessment of the matters raised in the Human Rights Watch report entitled *Hopeless, Starving and Besieged: Israel's Forced Displacement of Palestinians in Gaza*, published on 14 November 2024. However, the Government has been clear, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic and completely unacceptable. Nearly 44,000 people have been killed in Gaza and more than 90% of the population have been displaced, many of those repeatedly. We are clear that northern Gaza must not be cut off from the south, and there must be no forcible transfer of Gazans from or within Gaza, nor any reduction in the territory of the Gaza Strip. Israel must do better to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and - as reiterated by the Foreign Secretary at the UN Security Council on 18 November - ensure much more aid is allowed into Gaza. We have raised these issues with Israel, and on 8 November I reiterated our deep concern at reports suggesting that people would not be able to return to their homes in Northern Gaza. We continue to press all parties to comply with International Humanitarian Law.

■ **Gaza: Polio****Paula Barker:**[\[14965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will hold discussions with his international counterparts on taking steps to help prevent a polio outbreak in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK has been at the forefront of efforts to drive urgent action on polio vaccination in Gaza, including by convening an emergency session of the UN Security Council in August. The UK supported delivery of the vaccination campaign through our funding to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). The final phase of the polio vaccination rollout has now ended, but an estimated 6,800 to 13,700 children in North Gaza were not reached, because of intense IDF activity there. This is deplorable. Delaying the vaccination of any child puts them at risk and is unacceptable. As winter takes hold, we are urgently pressing Israel to ensure sufficient aid, including vital medical treatment, reaches civilians in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary reiterated this in his 14 November call with Israeli Foreign Minister Sa'ar.

■ **Hamas and Israel: Arrest Warrants****Dave Doogan:**[\[15508\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the International Criminal Court arrest warrants issued for (a) Benjamin Netanyahu, (b) Yoav Gallant and (c) Mohammed Deif.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We respect the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern. We remain focused on pushing for an immediate

ceasefire, to bring an end to the devastating violence in Gaza. This is essential to protect civilians, ensure the release of hostages and to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza.

■ **International Criminal Court: Departmental Responsibilities**

Brendan O'Hara: [\[16762\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, which Department leads on the International Criminal Court Act 2001.

Stephen Doughty:

Policy on the International Criminal Court (ICC), including the ICC Act (2001), is owned by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

■ **Israel: Arms Trade**

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[15385\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of suspending all arms sales to Israel.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

On day one in office, the Foreign Secretary commissioned a thorough review into Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), given the grave concerns about the conduct and consequences of the war in Gaza for civilians. The Strategic Export Licensing Criteria state that the Government will not issue or maintain export licences if there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law. Given the conclusions of the review, on 2 September the Government suspended export licences to Israel, effectively covering all arms exports for use in the current conflict in Gaza, exempting components for F-35 aircraft which, for reasons outlined in the Foreign Secretary's Statement and the Business and Trade Secretary's Written Ministerial Statement, have been excluded from the suspension.

■ **Israel: Palestinians**

Danny Beales: [\[15547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to encourage the possibility of a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK is working with partners to support a path to long-term peace and stability, with a two-state solution: a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. This government has prioritised working to end this conflict and secure the safe release of hostages, in co-ordination with international partners, since day one. We will continue to use every diplomatic lever to bring about a ceasefire deal as the first step towards long-term peace and security for Israelis and

Palestinians, and the wider region. The Foreign Secretary has raised the issue of securing long-term peace in all his meetings with counterparts across the region, in addition to the US, Germany and France. The UK will play our full diplomatic role in ending this conflict and creating a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 10864 on Israel: Palestinians, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of commissioning a delegation of (a) judges, (b) lawyers and (c) experts from the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative to (i) visit Israeli (A) detention facilities and (B) sites and (ii) produce a full investigatory report on their findings.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15570\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 10864 on Israel: Palestinians, whether the planned support from the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative will include assistance in evidence-gathering in relation to (a) proceedings and (b) prosecutions being undertaken by (i) national and (ii) international courts.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We have consistently called for all alleged violations and abuses, including sexual violence, to be fully investigated to ensure justice for victims and survivors. Our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Team of Experts deployment will scope options for future support. In the first instance, states themselves must investigate alleged criminal offences committed within their jurisdiction or by their nationals. We have been clear that the International Committee of the Red Cross must be given regular access to detainees.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what financial support his Department has provided to (a) Palestinian and (b) Israeli human rights organisations in the last three years.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what (a) briefings, (b) reports and (c) representations he has received from (i) Palestinian and (ii) Israeli human rights organisations.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK trebled its aid commitment to the OPTs in the last financial year. This Government has now committed £99 million to the OPTs this financial year to provide vital services to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank delivered through partner agencies and NGOs. Through our aid programmes, we support human rights organisations in Israel and the OPTs on a range of issues, whose work is invaluable

in providing us with relevant contextual analysis, in informing our engagements with relevant political authorities as well as in shaping our policy.

■ Israeli Settlements

Danny Beales:

[\[15546\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to help prevent illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK Government's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. To date, we have sanctioned eight individuals responsible for inciting and perpetrating human rights abuses against Palestinian communities in the West Bank. We have also designated two groups known to have supported, incited and promoted violence against these communities. We do not comment on future sanctions.

Ben Lake:

[\[16500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help prevent the development of illegal settlements in North Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. To date, we have sanctioned eight individuals responsible for inciting and perpetrating human rights abuses against Palestinian communities in the West Bank. We have also designated two groups known to have supported, incited and promoted violence against these communities. We do not comment on future sanctions.

■ James Scott Rhys Anderson

Alex Easton:

[\[16444\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he is having with his Russian counterpart on the release of James Scott Rhys Anderson.

Stephen Doughty:

The British Embassy in Moscow requested urgent confirmation of Mr Anderson's detention and location and reminded the Russian Federation of their obligations under International Humanitarian Law, including the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Consular officials remain in close contact with Mr Anderson's family to provide assistance.

■ Middle East: Armed Conflict**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of conflict in (a) Gaza and (b) Lebanon on stability in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Recent developments in Syria demonstrate how unstable the situation is. As I told colleagues in the House on 2 December, events in Syria are moving quickly, and the trajectory is unclear. Syria continues to be a theatre for regional tensions to play out, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian and security situation. Conflict in Lebanon led to the mass displacement of over half a million Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians fleeing into Syria. We continue to monitor this as people are displaced, once again, due to developments in the North West. The UN-led political process remains the only path to a stable, peaceful and prosperous Syria and we continue to call on the Assad regime to engage meaningfully with the process.

■ Mohammed Hamouda**Abtisam Mohamed:** [\[15678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is taking diplomatic steps to secure the release of Dr Mohammed Hamouda in Israel.

Abtisam Mohamed: [\[15679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to his Israeli counterpart on the case of Dr Mohammed Hamouda.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are concerned by the reports that Dr. Mohammed Hamouda was detained by the Israeli authorities on 6 November. I raised his case with the Israeli Ambassador in November and FCDO officials have been following up the case since then. Israel must allow medical staff to carry out their work unimpeded, and to travel around Gaza as needed.

■ Morocco: Cultural Relations**Paulette Hamilton:** [\[15276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government is taking to help promote (a) cultural exchange and (b) community engagement initiatives between the UK and Moroccan diaspora communities.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The FCDO convenes events open to both British nationals residing in Morocco and Moroccan nationals. These include regular business networking events in Casablanca, events celebrating current, former, and future Chevening Scholars, and

annual initiatives such as 'Ambassador for a Day' focusing on education and youth empowerment.

The British Council promotes cultural activity and exchange between the UK and Morocco on behalf of the UK government. Its activities span a variety of creative and cultural sectors, including filmmaking, literature, and music production, and its International Collaboration Grant currently supports artists in both the UK and Morocco.

■ Myanmar: Politics and Government

Brendan O'Hara: [\[16960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the (a) national unity government and (b) ethnic revolutionary organisations from Myanmar.

Catherine West:

We continue to meet regularly with a range of pro-democracy actors from Myanmar, including senior representatives from the National Unity Government (NUG) and from a number of Ethnic Resistance Organisations (EROs). The UK stands in solidarity with those calling for a return to democracy in Myanmar and we are committed to supporting a plurality of voices. The UK is clear that any future settlement for Myanmar, must be inclusive, and involve a wide range of opposition actors, including the NUG and EROs. The Myanmar military regime must engage with them and all other opposition groups.

■ Occupied Territories: Human Rights

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[15386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has taken recent steps to meet the duties set out in the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion entitled Legal Consequences Arising From The Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, published on 19 July 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK does not disagree with the central findings of the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on the 'Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem'. We are of the clear view that Israel should bring an end to its presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as rapidly as possible - but we are also clear that every effort must be made to create the conditions for negotiations towards a two-state solution. Our commitment to a two-state solution is unwavering.

■ South Korea: Religious Freedom**Jim Shannon:**[\[16165\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the cancellation of the Religious Leaders Forum and Graduation Ceremony for freedom of religion or belief in South Korea.

Catherine West:

The UK government is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. The UK and South Korea share a close partnership. Our Downing Street Accord commits us to such fundamental freedoms. This includes rights and freedoms relating to religion or beliefs, as set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights treaty, which ROK has been a member party of since 1990.

■ Syria: Politics and Government**Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[15622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has held discussions with the Syrian opposition.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK remains committed to the UN-facilitated political process and recognises the vital role that the Opposition has in facilitating a lasting peace settlement in Syria. We regularly meet representatives of the Syrian Opposition at official level including most recently on 13 November. Furthermore this year, as part of our ongoing support, the UK provided a direct grant to the Syrian Negotiation Commission to support their efforts.

■ Teachers: International Cooperation**Helen Grant:**[\[16143\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the recommendations from the United Nations Secretary General's High-level Panel on the Teaching Profession, published in February 2024, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of those recommendations in supporting teachers in emergencies.

Anneliese Dodds:

Education is critical to our vision for a world free from poverty on a liveable planet. Ensuring access to education in emergencies provides children with normality, protection and hope. Teachers are crucial to this, and supporting teachers underpins FCDO education policies and programmes. The UK is the second largest bilateral donor to Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the global fund for education in emergencies. ECW recruited or financially supported 23,449 teachers in 2022-23 (45 percent women). ECW also provided psychosocial support for teachers in Afghanistan, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Syria and Uganda, to help them to

continue to teach in the most difficult circumstances. The UK is working in partnership with the World Bank and UN Refugee Agency on a new programme, the Inclusion Support Programme for Refugee Education (INSPIRE), to unlock funding for host countries that are committed to including refugees within their own education systems. The programme works with teachers to address issues such as language of instruction, psychosocial support for children and teachers and negative stereotyping towards refugee children.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Abortion

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[16126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has taken steps to reduce the number of pregnancies terminated beyond 24 weeks.

Karin Smyth:

No steps have been taken to reduce the number of pregnancies terminated beyond 24 weeks gestation.

Abortion in England and Wales is governed by the Abortion Act 1967, which defines the criteria under which terminations can take place. Under the act, termination of pregnancies beyond 24 weeks is only permitted in limited circumstances. Before a termination can proceed, there is a legal requirement for two doctors to certify that in their opinion, which must be formed in good faith, at least one of the grounds for abortion as set out in the act are met, and these must be the same grounds.

■ Abortion: Drugs

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[16127\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will commission an inquiry into the safety of taking (a) mifepristone and (b) misoprostol at home to terminate a pregnancy.

Karin Smyth:

The Government has no plans to commission an inquiry into the safety of taking mifepristone and misoprostol at home to terminate a pregnancy. Abortion is a safe procedure for which major complications are rare, at all pregnancy gestations. Data does not show an increase in abortion complications following the introduction of home use of mifepristone and misoprostol for early medical abortion.

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[16128\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reversing whether the decision to allow women to take (a) mifepristone and (b) misoprostol at home to terminate a pregnancy.

Karin Smyth:

The Government has no plans to assess the potential merits of reversing the decision to allow women to take mifepristone and misoprostol at home to terminate a pregnancy. Abortion in England and Wales is governed by the Abortion Act 1967, which defines the criteria under which terminations can take place. Under the act, women have access to regulated and National Health Service funded abortion services, which now includes taking both abortion pills at home, up to a 10-week gestation.

As with other matters of conscience, abortion is an issue on which the Government adopts a neutral stance. It would be for Parliament to decide whether to make any changes to the law on abortion.

Ambulance Services: Undocumented Migrants**Rupert Lowe:**[\[16825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many ambulance visits there were to (a) hotels and (b) other accommodation housing irregular migrants in the most recent year for which information is available.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold the information requested.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Drugs**Jonathan Davies:**[\[16685\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle shortages of ADHD medication.

Karin Smyth:

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

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

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

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

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

Mary Glendon:

[16751]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer to Question 12405 of 13 November 2024, whether he has had discussions with the community pharmacy sector on improving real-time communication on the availability of ADHD medications to patients.

Karin Smyth:

No discussions have been held. The Department has worked with specialist clinicians, including those within the National Health Service, to develop management advice for the NHS. The guidance signposts all sectors to refer to the Specialist Pharmacy Service website for updates on the availability of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) medicines. The site is available at the following link:

<https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/prescribing-available-medicines-to-treat-adhd/>

The site is routinely updated to reflect the information we receive from United Kingdom suppliers regarding the availability of ADHD medicines in the UK.

■ Carers: Charities

Blake Stephenson:

[16288]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will ask local authorities to improve signposting of support groups for unpaid carers.

Stephen Kinnock:

Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities have duties to support people caring for their family and friends. It is for local authorities to decide how best to support their local population, including how they signpost unpaid carers to support groups.

The Government recognises the scale of the reforms needed in social care. That is why we will set out next steps for a process that engages with adult social care stakeholders, including cross-party and unpaid carers, to ensure their voices are heard as we develop plans to create a National Care Service.

Lord Darzi's independent review of the National Health Service is clear that a fresh approach to supporting and involving unpaid carers is required to improve outcomes for carers, people needing care, and the NHS.

■ Community Diagnostic Centres**Paulette Hamilton:**[\[16638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to ensure that Community Diagnostic Centres are accessible to everyone in (a) Birmingham Erdington constituency and (b) England.

Karin Smyth:

The Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) programme now delivers activity on 168 sites across the country, and data published in August 2024 showed CDCs have delivered over 10.4 million diagnostic tests since July 2021.

The National Health Service has endeavoured to ensure that each integrated care system (ICS) has at least two CDCs, and there is now a standard or large model CDC approved in every NHS integrated care system area. Locations of CDCs were determined based on a set of specific criteria, including need for diagnostic provision, accessibility for patients by private and public transport and factors which would support health inequalities.

Whilst there is no CDC located in the Birmingham Erdington constituency, Birmingham and Solihull ICB hosts three CDCs in the local area, including Washwood Heath CDC in Saltley, North Solihull CDC in Chelmsley Wood and South Birmingham CDC in Maypole. CDCs provide additional, digitally connected, diagnostic capacity in England, which supports existing diagnostic capacity, including at acute sites such as at Birmingham Heartlands Hospital.

NHS England is also supporting systems to make a wider range of direct access tests available to general practices (GP) nationally and in Birmingham, through the GP Direct Access Scheme. This includes via direct referrals to CDCs, than need for a pre appointment and to increase speed of access. Phases 1 and 2 of the GP Direct Access Scheme are focussed on expanding use of direct access tests for cancer and respiratory conditions, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

The Government has committed £1.5 billion of capital funding for new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners. This will build capacity for over 30,000 additional

procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests, as well as new beds which will create more treatment space in emergency departments, reduce waiting times, and help shift more care into the community. More details will follow in due course.

■ Dementia: Medical Treatments

Manuela Perteghella:

[\[16370\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve waiting times to access dementia treatment in Warwickshire.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 3 December 2024]: Coventry and Warwickshire ICS have a number of initiatives aimed at increasing capacity for dementia assessment and treatment, particularly in South Warwickshire where it is recognised that there are longer delays.

An additional consultant and team have been in place in South Warwickshire since September 2024 to run intensive clinics, increasing assessment and treatment capacity and speed.

In November 2024, South Warwickshire added additional weekend dementia clinics.

The Memory Service in Warwickshire have introduced a range of measures to maximise specialist staff capacity, including employing additional administrative staff to complete tasks not requiring a specialist clinician. October 2024 saw a 40% increase in number of assessments completed by the team compared to the average earlier this year, and a 59% increase in reviews of existing patients.

■ Dementia: Research

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[14638\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the level of funding available for research into (a) Alzheimer's disease and (b) other forms of dementia.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Department funds research into dementia via the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The NIHR continues to invest in dementia research across all areas, from causes, diagnosis and prevention to treatment, care and support, including for carers.

The NIHR has established several investments to boost progress and funding in dementia such as the £49.9 million Dementia Trials Network, which will deliver a coordinated network of early phase dementia trial sites. The NIHR is also funding two Dementia and Neurodegeneration Policy Research Units worth £3 million per unit to further boost evidence for policymaking. As well as this, the NIHR continues to fund the successful £13.5 million Three Schools Dementia Programme which links public health, primary care and social care via our NIHR research schools, namely Schools for Social Care, Public Health and Primary Care Research. The NIHR has also

awarded almost £11 million of funding to develop new digital approaches for the early detection and diagnosis of dementia.

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

■ Dental Services: Access

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[16227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of access to NHS dentists.

Stephen Kinnock:

Dental Statistics - England 2023-24, published by the NHS Business Services Authority on 22 August 2024, is available at the following link:

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

The Government plans to tackle the challenges for patients trying to access National Health Service dental care with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term and increase access to NHS dental care, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

■ Dental Services: Pregnancy

Alice Macdonald: [\[10938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department holds on the number of (a) pregnant women and (b) new mothers receiving free dental treatment on the NHS (i) nationally and (ii) by region.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 1 November 2024]: Pregnant women and new mothers are entitled to free National Health Service dental care. The following table shows the total number of Courses of Treatment delivered nationally to new mothers and pregnant women over the last five years:

PATIENT TYPE	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Expectant mother	304,536	104,659	204,229	215,528	211,935
Mother of child born in the year before	471,033	144,737	289,624	330,000	321,718

PATIENT TYPE	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
treatment started					

Source: Data is published by the NHS Business Services Authority, and is available at the following link: <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/statistical-collections/dental-england/dental-statistics-england-202324>

We do not hold data for each region.

■ Dentistry: Recruitment

Linsey Farnsworth: [\[13039\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that contract negotiations take into account variations in unit prices between dentistry practices (a) across England and (b) that are geographically close to one another; and what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of such variations on recruitment of dentists.

Stephen Kinnock:

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning primary care services, including National Health Service dentistry, to meet the needs of their local populations and to determine the priorities for investment.

Differential Unit of Dental Activity (UDA) rates allow providers to use differing pay rates to reflect the local market rates. From April 2024 a new minimum UDA value of £28 was set to support practices with historically low UDA rates. ICBs can also influence the UDA rate locally, which may help to support local interventions.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Policy

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[16812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how their Department defines strategy.

Karin Smyth:

The definition is detailed in the Functional Standards Common Glossary, which is published on the GOV.UK website.

■ Epilepsy and Parkinson's Disease: Drugs

Martin Wrigley: [\[16608\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to mitigate the impact of shortages of medicines for people with (a) epilepsy and (b) Parkinson's disease.

Karin Smyth:

The Department is working hard with industry to help resolve intermittent supply issues with some epilepsy medications. As a result of ongoing activity and intensive work, including directing suppliers to expedite deliveries, some issues, including with some carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine presentations, have been resolved.

There is a supply issue with all strengths of lamotrigine tablets, used to manage epilepsy, due to manufacturing issues. A supply issue with one of the strengths of lamotrigine tablets has recently resolved, and the remaining strengths are expected to resolve from early December 2024. Other manufacturers of lamotrigine tablets can meet the increased demand during this time.

The Department is aware of supply constraints with one supplier of amantadine 100mg capsules used in the management of Parkinson's Disease, however stocks remain available from alternative suppliers to cover this demand.

The Department continues to work closely with industry, the NHS and others to help ensure patients continue to have access to an alternative treatment until their usual product is back in stock.

■ General Practitioners: Broxbourne**Lewis Cocking:**[\[15844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to make it easier for patients in Broxbourne constituency to contact their GP practice to book appointments.

Stephen Kinnock:

We know patients are struggling to contact their general practices (GP), including in the Broxbourne constituency. That is why we have committed to eliminating the 8:00am scramble for appointments by implementing a modern appointment booking system.

The most recent data from the Health Insight Survey found that between July and August 2024, 78% of people had successfully contacted their GP on the same day, in the last 28 days. Of those who tried to contact their GP practice in the last 28 days, 72.6% of adults perceived their overall experience of their GP practice as either 'Very Good' or 'Good'.

99.4% of the primary care estate are now live with digital telephony and 90% have been enrolled to use online registration systems.

We are determined to reduce bureaucracy, which is why the Government has launched a red tape challenge, ensuring GPs spend less time filling in forms and more time caring for patients.

■ General Practitioners: Paisley and Renfrewshire North

Alison Taylor:

[\[13230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help support GP practices in Paisley and Renfrewshire North constituency, in the context of the changes made to employers' National Insurance Contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024.

Stephen Kinnock:

Whilst the Department holds some reserved functions, health is predominantly devolved. This includes services within the National Health Service in Scotland, which are the responsibility of Scottish Government. It is for the Scottish Government to decide how to direct the £1.5 billion of extra funding delivered by the budget this year and £3.4 billion next year. We have taken necessary decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at Autumn Budget, which enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The employer National Insurance rise will be implemented April 2025, with the Department setting out further details on allocation of funding, including for NHS England and Primary Care, for next year in due course.

■ Health Services: Hertfordshire

David Taylor:

[\[16849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to improve access to healthcare services in Hertfordshire.

Karin Smyth:

The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) is responsible for improving access to healthcare services in Hertfordshire.

NHS England has informed us that the ICB is delivering its responsibility to improve support for those in mental health crisis through the launch of a Mental Health Urgent Care Centre, providing a more appropriate and therapeutic environment at the Lister Hospital in Stevenage. The ICB has also increased children and young people's mental health access by 44% year-on-year, according to the latest data.

According to NHS England's assessment, people across Hertfordshire now have significantly improved access to blood pressure checks across a range of settings, including general practice, community pharmacy, some dental and optometry sites, outpatient departments, and through community services.

A purpose-built theatre suite is set to open at St Albans City Hospital in Spring 2025. The ICB states that this will provide non-complex orthopaedic, hip and knee surgery, spinal injections, and ear, nose and throat procedures for approximately 4,400 patients per year, from across the ICB's area.

The 10-Year Health Plan will consider the change needed to meet the three Health Mission goals, those being: a fairer system where everyone lives well for longer; a

National Health Service that is there when people need it; and fewer lives lost to the biggest killers.

■ Health Services: Prisons

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:

[\[15840\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the quality of healthcare provision across the prison estate.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 29 November 2024]: NHS England's Health and Justice Oversight Delivery Group is responsible for governance and oversight of delivery and continuous improvement in health and justice commissioned services.

NHS England, via the regional health and justice teams, has regular meetings with prison healthcare providers to ensure the quality of the services that are provided. These are also supplemented with local partnership boards, where governors, commissioners, and providers meet to discuss any issues, risks, and areas of concern.

NHS England also works closely with the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman to identify themes, trends, and learning from recommendations made as part of the investigations into deaths in custody, and also takes learning and insights around preventable events from preventing future deaths reports and commissioner-led complaints.

NHS England is undertaking a review of health and justice service specifications to ensure they remain fit for purpose in relation to patient needs, developments in health and justice, and the wider National Health Service. This review includes engagement with lived experience, commissioners, providers, clinical leads, partner organisations, and stakeholders, along with NHS England directorates. This review of service specifications may also provide opportunities for the improvement of the provision of services. It is expected that publication of the refreshed specifications will start in 2025, and will be fully complete by the end of March 2026.

■ Health Services: Standards

Deirdre Costigan:

[\[15301\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, If he will make a comparative assessment of the adequacy of NHS care at (a) weekends and (b) weekdays.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 25 November 2024]: The National Health Service is committed to ensuring safe, high-quality care is available to patients seven days a week, whether they require emergency treatment or ongoing care. While there are natural variations in activity levels between weekends and weekdays, such as lower elective activity at weekends, hospital teams prioritise urgent care needs to ensure timely and effective treatment regardless of the day. Hospital staffing on weekends is designed to address the severity of patients' conditions and the demands on services.

■ Hospices: Children and Young People

Jim Shannon:

[14466]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to review the funding model for hospices for children and young people as part of the 10-Year Health Plan for the NHS.

Stephen Kinnock:

Most hospices are charitable, independent organisations which receive some statutory funding for providing services within the National Health Service. The amount of funding charitable hospices receive varies by integrated care board (ICB) area, and will, in part, be dependent on the breadth of palliative and end of life care provision within each ICB catchment area.

We have committed to develop a 10-year plan to deliver an NHS fit for the future. We will carefully be considering policies, including those that impact people with palliative and end of life care needs, with input from the public, patients, health staff, and our stakeholders, including those in the hospice sector, as we develop the plan.

The engagement process has been launched, and I would encourage the palliative and end of life care sector, including hospice providers, service users and their families, to engage with that process to allow us to fully understand what is not working as well as it should and what the potential solutions are. More information is available at the following link:

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

■ Insulin: Pharmacy

Lisa Smart:

[16775]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure insulin is distributed to (a) large and (b) small pharmacies across the UK.

Karin Smyth:

The Department continues to work with all suppliers to ensure that insulin products are distributed and available for both small and large pharmacies.

There are ongoing global supply issues with Tresiba FlexTouch 100 units per millilitre pre-filled pens and Fiasp FlexTouch 100 units per millilitre pre-filled pens. We have issued communications to National Health Service healthcare professionals, providing comprehensive management guidance, advice, and information to allow them to support their patients in the management of the supply issues.

■ Mental Capacity: Safeguard measures

Sarah Olney:

[16208]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the number of uncompleted Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard applications per year since 2009.

Stephen Kinnock:

The annual Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Assessments consist of data collected from local authorities in England, who are the supervisory bodies for authorising deprivations of liberty for adults in care homes and hospitals. The aim of this publication is to inform users about aspects of DoLS activity.

Since the Cheshire West court ruling in 2014, the definition of a 'deprivation of liberty' under DoLS widened, and so did the number of cases local authorities had to assess. The increase in cases has led to a backlog. The following table shows the number of Deprivation of Liberty Protection Safeguard applications received, completed, and not completed, each year from 2013/14 to 2023/24:

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPLETED APPLICATIONS	TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS NOT COMPLETED
2013/14	13,715	13,040	N/A
2014/15	137,540	62,645	N/A
2015/16	195,840	105,055	101,740
2016/17	217,235	151,970	108,545
2017/18	227,400	181,785	125,630
2018/19	240,455	216,005	131,350
2019/20	263,940	243,300	129,780
2020/21	256,610	246,025	119,740
2021/22	270,650	254,215	124,145
2022/23	300,765	289,150	126,100
2023/24	332,455	323,870	123,790

Source: data is published by NHS Digital, and is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-capacity-act-2005-deprivation-of-liberty-safeguards-assessments>

Data was not routinely collected on applications not completed prior to 2015/16.

Sarah Olney:**[16209]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the average waiting time was for a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard to be processed for standard authorisation per year since 2009.

Stephen Kinnock:

The annual Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Assessments consist of data collected by NHS Digital from local authorities in England, who are the supervisory bodies for authorising deprivations of liberty for adults in care homes and hospitals. The aim of this publication is to inform users about the aspects of DoLS activity. NHS Digital collects data on the average length of time for all completed DoLS applications. The statutory deadline for a standard authorisation is 21 days, and seven days for an urgent authorisation. This data was not routinely collected prior to 2016/17.

The following table shows the number of granted authorisation of standard applications and the mean average number of days for standard authorisation of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards applications, each year from 2016/17 to 2023/24:

YEAR	NUMBER OF GRANTED AUTHORISATIONS FROM STANDARD APPLICATIONS	MEAN DURATION OF ACTUAL AUTHORISATION PERIOD IN DAYS FOR STANDARD APPLICATIONS
2016/17	30,865	226
2017/18	51,995	250
2018/19	63,020	264
2019/20	69,895	271
2020/21	75,995	270
2021/22	68,565	269
2022/23	75,065	270
2023/24	80,150	276

Source: data is published by NHS Digital, and is available at the following link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-capacity-act-2005-deprivation-of-liberty-safeguards-assessments>

■ Mental Health Services: Children and Young People

Ian Sollom:

[15866]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to extend the extra funding awarded to early support hubs after March 2025.

Stephen Kinnock:

My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer presented the Autumn Budget to Parliament on 30 October 2024. As a Department, we are finalising the outcomes of the Budget. We will set out plans for mental health funding for 2025/26 in due course. We remain committed to improving mental health support for children and

young people, with our commitment to roll out a network of Young Futures Hubs to provide open access mental health support as proof of this.

■ **NHS: Interpreters**

Rupert Lowe: [\[16771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of training to raise awareness of the role of interpreting within the NHS.

Karin Smyth:

The provision of interpretation services is the responsibility of the service provider. There is no national programme for training to raise awareness of interpreting within the National Health Service.

■ **NHS: Interpreters and Translation Services**

Rupert Lowe: [\[16690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing (a) family and (b) friends to provide (i) translation and (ii) interpretation during NHS appointments.

Karin Smyth:

The General Medical Council's guidance states that all possible efforts must be made to ensure effective communication with patients. This includes arrangements to meet patients' communication needs in languages other than English.

Where language is a problem in discussing health matters, NHS England and NHS Scotland's guidance states that a professional interpreter should always be offered, rather than using family or friends to interpret. Further information on NHS England and NHS Scotland's guidance is available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/guidance-for-commissioners-interpreting-and-translation-services-in-primary-care/>

<https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/interpreting-communication-support-and-translation-national-policy/>

Working with professional interpreters will:

- ensure the accuracy and impartiality of interpreting;
- minimise legal risk of misinterpretation of important clinical information, for example informed consent to undergo clinical treatments and procedures;
- minimise safeguarding risk, for example for victims of human trafficking, where the trafficker may introduce themselves as a family member or friend and speak on behalf of the patient;
- allow family members and friends to attend appointments and support the patient, emotionally and with decision-making, without the added pressure of needing to interpret; and

- foster trust with the patient.

It is also inappropriate to use children as interpreters. An interpreter should also be present in all situations where there are concerns about child safety or gender-based violence, and language translation is required.

■ NHS: Procurement

Peter Fortune:

[16900]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation on Tackling modern slavery in NHS procurement: proposed regulations and guidance, published on 21 November 2024.

Karin Smyth:

The consultation document is available in an accessible format, on the GOV.UK website, at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tackling-modern-slavery-in-nhs-procurement-proposed-regulations-and-guidance/tackling-modern-slavery-in-nhs-procurement-proposed-regulations-and-guidance>

It is alongside a digital survey, also hosted on an accessible platform, for users to respond to the consultation.

■ NHS: Public Consultation

Joe Robertson:

[16662]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what the cost to the public purse has been of NHS public engagement roadshows by (a) attendee payments, (b) travel costs, (c) accommodation costs, (d) staff overtime costs and (e) administrative expenses.

Joe Robertson:

[16663]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his Department's budget is for NHS public engagement roadshows in the 2024-25 financial year; and what steps his Department is taking to help prevent over-spends on roadshows.

Joe Robertson:

[16664]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what objectives his Department has identified for its public engagement roadshow on the future of the NHS; and if he will make an assessment of the value for money provided by the programme.

Joe Robertson:

[16665]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what process his Department plans to use for incorporating feedback from its public engagement roadshow on the future of the NHS into NHS (a) planning and (b) reforms.

Karin Smyth:

The promise that the National Health Service will be there for you when you need it has been broken for too many people. That is why we have launched the biggest ever national conversation on the future of the NHS.

Despite consensus from health experts and charities that we need to make three shifts, from hospital to community, analogue to digital, and sickness to prevention, to ensure that the NHS is fit for the future, this hasn't happened. We need to do things differently, and that is why instead of writing a plan in London and asking people what they think of it, we're starting by asking the public and staff what is most important to them. We want their fingerprints to be all over the 10-Year Health Plan, as we want them to feel the positive impact in their lives.

To do this, we are running a series of regional deliberative events with the public and staff. Deliberative engagement is a widely respected methodology that involves communities in decision-making, to understand their needs and hopes for the services which affect their lives. The approach ensures we hear from a variety of perspectives and encourages free, fair, and open discussion.

The events are being delivered within the Department's budget as part of its responsibility to promote the health and wellbeing of everyone in England. We are determined to do this in a way that gives everyone the chance to get involved, while also ensuring value for money. At this point in time, we are not able to provide accurate costs for the deliberative events, because they are still ongoing.

Our engagement exercise will help us to develop the 10-Year Health Plan. We will work closely with charities and national organisations, health and care providers, local government, and others to help us do this. All the insight we receive, whether at an organisational or individual level, will be considered alongside a wide range of data points to shape the development of the plan.

To support this work, we have also established 11 policy working groups which will consider the future vision for the NHS, and the areas of the NHS that will need to change to achieve this.

Peter Fortune:[\[16890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the Change.NHS.UK consultation, published on 24 October 2024.

Karin Smyth:

On 21 October we launched the biggest ever national conversation on the future of the National Health Service. We are putting the public and staff at the centre of the policy making process. We have designed this engagement to make sure as many people as possible from all communities and backgrounds are supported to contribute their views. This is being done through the change.NHS.UK website, and through online and in-person events across England.

The change.NHS.UK website provides a variety of formats and ways to respond, for a range of accessibility needs. This includes British Sign Language (BSL) and easy-read formats of the surveys, and the option to respond by post, email, telephone, or BSL video. There is a dedicated accessibility page on the website that signposts to these formats and the alternative ways to respond, as well as contact details for any further support. We were made aware of some digital accessibility issues on the website, and the majority of the issues are now resolved. Further detail is set out in the accessibility statement on the change.NHS.UK website.

■ NHS: Rural Areas

Sir Geoffrey Cox:

[\[16131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help support businesses that provide services to the NHS in rural areas, in the context of changes to the level of employer National Insurance contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024.

Karin Smyth:

We have taken tough decisions to fix the foundations in the public finances at the Autumn Budget, and this enabled the Spending Review settlement of a £22.6 billion increase in resource spending for the Department from 2023/24 outturn to 2025/26. The employer National Insurance rise will be implemented April 2025, 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.

■ NHS: Translation Services

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16683\]](#)

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 , what the reason was for the change in the number of e-RS letters sent out in (a) 2019/20 and (b) 2020/21.

Karin Smyth:

The main reason for the change in the number of e-Referral Service (e-RS) letters sent out in 2019/20 and 2020/21 was the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced the number of referrals being created in the National Health Service e-RS. In addition, in early 2020, NHS England halved the number of e-RS letters sent to patients where their referral was considered Routine, as it had not been classified as either Urgent or for Suspected Cancer.

■ NHS: Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16647\]](#)

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

Karin Smyth:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave on 27 November 2024 to Question [14728](#).

■ **Pectus Excavatum: Surgery****Mike Martin:**[\[16864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 15347 on Pectus Excavatum: Surgery, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact on the (a) mental and (b) physical health of children who fall below the Haller index threshold of not receiving that surgery.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 3 December 2024]: In April 2023, the National Health Service published an urgent policy statement for the clinical treatment of pectus excavatum and the eligibility criteria for surgical intervention.

Any physical or psychological assessment of children who fall below the eligibility threshold for surgery to treat pectus excavatum is the responsibility of their clinician. Pectus excavatum may also be treated by non-surgical interventions.

As part of its five long-term missions, the Government has begun work on a 10-year plan for change and modernisation, to make the NHS fit for the future, ensuring a better health service for everyone, regardless of condition or service area.

■ **Prosthetics: Waiting Lists****Mike Amesbury:**[\[16820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to help reduce the time taken for patients to be fitted with prosthetics.

Karin Smyth:

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

Following amputation, patients are referred to their local prosthetic centre for a limb fitting assessment and ongoing care. As part of the patients' assessment, a clinical judgement will be made to ensure the wound is healed in advance of a prosthetic limb being fitted. This timescale varies depending on individual patient clinical circumstances.

Once a patient is assessed as clinically ready for a prosthesis, they should be scanned or cast within two weeks, and receive their socket and prosthesis within four weeks from the date of the scan or casting. The national service specification has recently been reviewed, and the updated version is expected to be published in 2025. This is expected to include metrics which can be used to monitor the quality of care, such as the time between the date of the scan or casting and the patients receiving their socket and prosthesis.

The majority of prosthetics will be fitted in outpatient settings, and the vast majority of elective care takes place in an outpatient setting, so it is a top priority to ensure that those services are delivered efficiently, in a timely way, and that they prioritise patient experience. To tackle waiting lists, we will also deliver an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments per week during our first year in Government as a first step in our commitment to ensuring that patients can expect to be treated within 18 weeks. We will be supporting National Health Service trusts to deliver these through innovation, sharing best practice to increase productivity and efficiency, and ensuring the best value is delivered.

■ **Protective Clothing: Storage**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16678\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November to Question 13915 on Protective Clothing: Storage, if he will publish a breakdown of where personal protective equipment that is unsuitable for NHS use is stored.

Karin Smyth:

Since April 2022, operational management of pandemic era personal protective equipment (PPE) has been carried out by the NHS Supply Chain. They report that PPE considered unsuitable for use in the National Health Service is currently held at the following locations prior to exit from the system, as per data from the end of November 2024:

- containerised stock is currently in Hartlepool and Tadcaster; and
- palletised stock is currently held in Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire.

■ **Suicide: Asylum and Refugees**

Olivia Blake:

[R] [\[16565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will take steps to improve data collection on suicide rates of (a) asylum seekers and (b) refugees.

Stephen Kinnock:

The cross-Government suicide prevention strategy for England sets the direction for departments and a wide range of other organisations, and makes clear that nobody should be left out of suicide prevention efforts. This includes being responsive to the needs of marginalised communities and addressing inequalities in access to effective interventions to prevent suicides, including for vulnerable groups like refugees and asylum seekers.

The ambitions in the strategy include more comprehensive research on, and better understanding of, national trends and suicide rates in particular groups of people, with a focus on at-risk groups that include refugees and asylum seekers.

Official statistics on deaths by suicide for England are collected and published by the Office for National Statistics, and not by the Department. The official statistics are

based on information recorded when deaths occur, are certified, and then registered. For deaths by suicide, registration can occur up to two years after the date of death, and on occasion longer. There is no information recorded as part of the death registration process to inform if a person was a refugee or an asylum seeker.

Improved data collection is part of ongoing wider action. This includes the development of the near to Real Time Suspected Suicide Surveillance (nRTSSS) system. Drawing upon data collected by the local police force attending deaths considered a 'suspected suicide', the nRTSSS provides an early warning system for potential changes in trends in suicides. There are current efforts to investigate the potential for this system to include intelligence relating to refugee and asylum seekers.

■ Tranexamic Acid

Mr Paul Kohler:

[\[16445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of making Tranexamic Acid (TXA) a Schedule 19 Drug.

Karin Smyth:

Discussions on the administration of tranexamic acid (TXA) formed part of the Manchester Arena Inquiry, established in 2019, to investigate the deaths of the victims of the attack on the Arena on 22 May 2017. One of the inquiry's recommendations tasked the Department, the Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care, the College of Paramedics, and the National Ambulance Resilience Unit to undertake a review into whether frontline ambulances should carry intramuscular TXA.

Intramuscular TXA is available to paramedics as a route of administration, and is now advocated in national guidance. Additional work is being taken forward regarding the intramuscular route of administration. This work is currently considering alternative methods using newly developed concentrated forms of TXA to achieve more rapid administration, and whether this could be used safely by wider group of responders.

■ Wandsworth Prison: Health Services

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:

[\[15839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made with Cabinet colleagues of the adequacy of healthcare provision in HMP Wandsworth.

Stephen Kinnock:

[Holding answer 29 November 2024]: Healthcare services at HMP Wandsworth underwent inspection, jointly undertaken by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and the Care Quality Commission, in May 2024. The joint inspectorate noted that improvements had been made across the provision of healthcare since the last inspection. The full report is available at the following link:

https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/hmp-wandsworth-3/

NHS England continues to monitor service provision and the quality of the healthcare service, meeting with the healthcare provider on a quarterly basis to discuss quality and assurance matters. Quality and assurance visits to the service are also taking place, attended by the Lead Commissioner and Clinical Quality Lead.

■ **Westmorland Hospital: Maternity Services**

Tim Farron:

[\[16466\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether her Department has a planned timetable for when services in Helme Chase Maternity Unit at Westmorland General Hospital will be reopened.

Karin Smyth:

The reconfiguration of services is a matter for integrated care boards and local healthcare systems, in cases of specialised and national services. All service changes should be based on clear evidence, clinically led, and involve engagement with patients and stakeholders, to ensure they will deliver better outcomes for patients. The trust will be publishing a timeline for the reopening of this service shortly.

Due to staffing issues in May 2024, there was a temporary suspension of birth services at the Helme Chase Maternity Unit, for a period of six months. Following a full review of the service and relevant staffing models, the trust has developed options which will allow reinstatement of birth services at the unit. The best option is currently being consulted with the relevant teams, and will be shared at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst birthing services are temporarily suspended, women can access antenatal and postnatal care, and outpatient appointments at Helme Chase continue as normal. The trust's home birth service and consultant-led birth services at Furness General Hospital and the Royal Lancaster Infirmary also remain unchanged.

HOME OFFICE

■ **Asylum**

Julia Lopez:

[\[16225\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of asylum claims have been approved since 4 July 2024.

Julia Lopez:

[\[16226\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish a breakdown of approved asylum claims by country of origin since 4 July 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on initial decisions on asylum claims by nationality is published in table Asy_D02 of the '[Asylum applications, initial decisions and](#)

[resettlement detailed datasets](#). Information on how to use the datasets can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbooks. The latest data relates to year ending September 2024.

■ Asylum: Travel

Rupert Lowe: [\[16292\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on asylum seekers visiting their country of origin whilst still resident in the UK.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Claimants whose asylum claim has not been decided are not permitted to leave the UK without permission, for example to visit their country of origin, until their claim has been concluded. If they do so, their claim may be withdrawn under the Immigration Rules.

■ Community Policing: Dorset

Tom Hayes: [\[16679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress she has made on delivering additional neighbourhood police officers in Dorset.

Dame Diana Johnson:

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

We are working closely with policing to implement this commitment and will announce our plans.

■ Construction: Undocumented Migrants

Sir John Hayes: [\[16119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an estimate of the number of people working illegally in the construction industry.

Sir John Hayes: [\[16120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many business owners have been charged with employing illegal workers in each of the last three years.

Sir John Hayes: [\[16121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate she has made of the number of people working illegally in car washes.

Sir John Hayes:

[\[16906\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate she has made of the number of people working illegally in the food and drink sector.

Sir John Hayes:

[\[16907\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an estimate of the number of people working illegally in nail bars in England and Wales.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The government takes illegal working very seriously, and we are determined to clamp down on the employment of individuals with no right to work in the UK, including the sectors highlighted by the Rt Hon Gentleman.

Since this government came to office, Immigration Enforcement's Criminal and Financial Investigation teams have charged six individuals with employing illegal workers, compared to just four in the previous two and a half years combined. Those six charges may represent progress on the dismal record of inaction seen under the previous government, but they still add up to an unacceptably low rate of enforcement against businesses employing, and in many cases exploiting, illegal workers, and we are therefore determined to go further over the coming months and years.

As part of this, we are also determined to establish a more comprehensive, accurate and up to date evidence base of the scale and nature of illegal working in the UK, which we hope will in due course allow us to provide robust answers to the questions raised by the Rt Hon Gentleman concerning the estimates of the number of people working illegally in specific, high-risk sectors and industries.

■ Firearms: Licensing

Max Wilkinson:

[\[16324\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to ensure that the cost of firearms licensing does not reduce resources available for other operational policing.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Firearms licensing fees have not been increased since 2015 and are now significantly less than the cost of the service provided by the police.

The Government's Manifesto includes a commitment to move to full cost recovery for firearms licensing fees, and moving to full cost recovery will help protect the public by providing police forces with the funding they need to properly resource and train their firearms licensing teams, and to carry out thorough checks and continuous assessment of the suitability of someone to possess a lethal firearm.

■ Police**Valerie Vaz:** [\[16174\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of the number of additional (a) police officers, (b) police community support officers and (c) special constables there will be in each police force in each of the next three years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

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

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

■ Police: Biometrics**Sir John Whittingdale:** [\[16117\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to hold roundtable discussions on the police's use of facial recognition technology; and who will attend the roundtable discussions.

Sir John Whittingdale: [\[16118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to introduce legislation to govern the use of facial recognition technology by the police.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Live facial technology is being used effectively by some police forces to identify suspects more quickly and accurately. Its use is governed by data protection, equality, and human rights legislation supplemented by specific policing guidance. However, I am aware of the concerns some have expressed about the lack of specific statutory provision for police use of the technology.

At the Westminster Hall Debate on live facial recognition on 13 November, I was clear that the government wants to take time to think carefully about how much support the police may need from Government and Parliament to set and manage the rules for the use of this technology.

I will also be listening to those with views on the legal framework and to the public in the coming months. This will include a series of roundtable meetings in December and January with regulators, civil society groups and industry.

■ Police: Cambridgeshire**Ben Obese-Jecty:**[\[17018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 3381 on Police: Cambridgeshire, how many of the additional 13,000 police personnel will be redeployed police constables; what criteria her Department will use to determine which roles are redeployed; and which roles will be in scope for redeployment.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government is committed to introducing a neighbourhood policing guarantee as part of its Safer Streets mission. This will include the delivery of an additional 13,000 police officers, PCSOs and special constables into neighbourhood policing roles throughout England and Wales and will ensure that every community has a named officer to turn to. The Home Office is working with policing to deliver this increase which will include a combination of additional recruitment and redeployment into neighbourhood policing roles. We will announce our plans for the delivery of neighbourhood officers in 25/26 shortly.

■ Police: West Midlands**Valerie Vaz:**[\[16175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate she has made of the level of funding that will be required for policing in (a) the West Midlands and (b) Walsall and Bloxwich constituency in each of the next three years; and how much funding her Department plans to provide for policing in those areas in the same period.

Valerie Vaz:[\[16176\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the policing funding formula for meeting need in the West Midlands.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is determined to ensure the police have the resources they need to protect our communities.

On 19th November, the Home Secretary announced that government funding for policing will increase by over half a billion pounds; this includes an increase of over £260m in the core grant for police forces, additional funding for neighbourhood policing, the NCA and counter terrorism.

Force level funding allocations for the financial year 2025-26 will be confirmed at the police funding settlement. Funding for future years beyond 2025-26 will be set out in phase two of the Spending Review where we will want to consider police funding in the round. This will include how police funding is allocated to forces.

Valerie Vaz: [\[16177\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the distribution of Police Uplift Programme funding on the safety of poorer communities in the West Midlands.

Dame Diana Johnson:

West Midlands Police was allocated a total of £2,547.1m during the period covered by the previous Government's Police Uplift Programme.

By the end of the Police Uplift Programme West Midlands Police recruited 1,376 additional uplift officers (headcount) against a total three-year allocation of 1,218 officers.

Forces are operationally independent, and it is for Chief Constables and directly elected PCCs, and Mayors with PCC functions to make operational decisions on how best to use their available resources to meet local needs.

Valerie Vaz: [\[16178\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many (a) police officers and (b) police community support officers there were in (i) rural and (ii) urban areas in the West Midlands in each year since 2019; and if she will make an estimate of the number there will be in each of the next three years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not hold information on the number of police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) specifically in rural and urban areas of West Midlands.

The Home Office collects and publishes data on the size of the police workforce in England and Wales on a bi-annual basis in the 'Police Workforce, England and Wales' statistical bulletin, available here:

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

The data is collected at Police Force Area (PFA) level only, and information at lower levels of geography is not collected.

Information on the number of police officers and PCSOs, broken down by PFA, as at 31 March 2007 to 2024 can be found in the 'Police Workforce Open Data Table' here: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/669a910da3c2a28abb50d34b/open-data-table-police-workforce-240724.ods>

Data on the police workforce as at 31 March 2025 is due to be published in Summer 2025.

The restoration of neighbourhood policing is at the heart of this Government's plans for police reform. We are working with policing to implement a new Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, which will be supported by delivering an additional 13,000 police officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing roles across the country and we will ensure every community has a named officer to turn to.

■ Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill

Colum Eastwood:

[\[16282\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill on (a) small voluntary groups and (b) small venues.

Dan Jarvis:

The Government is extremely mindful of the many community and voluntary-run premises across the UK. It has been conscious of the need to ensure the Terrorism (Protection of Premises Bill) strikes the right balance between public protection and avoiding undue burdens on premises and events. That is why important changes were made to the Bill since it was published in draft, particularly to the standard tier which comprises the smaller premises, many of which may be utilised by small voluntary groups.

We have doubled the qualifying threshold at which premises will come within scope of the Bill (at the standard tier) to where it is reasonable to expect that 200 people may be present at the same time. This has removed the smallest premises from scope, and made the requirements less prescriptive. The focus is on having procedures that are intended to be simple and low cost. For example, we have removed the requirement for a specific, prescribed form of training in recognition that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. Additionally, the Bill will not require premises in the standard tier to purchase or install any additional physical measures.

Dedicated guidance and support will be provided for those in scope of the Bill, to ensure that they have the required information on what to do and how best to do it. The guidance will be easy to follow, needing no particular expertise.

Colum Eastwood:

[\[16283\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing funding schemes to support small voluntary groups with the costs of compliance with the measures in the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.

Dan Jarvis:

The Government has made important changes to the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill since it was published in draft, particularly to the standard tier, to ensure that the requirements strike a better balance between protecting the public and avoiding undue burden on premises.

The requirements for smaller premises are focused on simple, low-cost activities to enact policies and procedures. The smaller premises on the standard tier will be required to have in place appropriate and reasonably practicable public protection procedures to reduce the risk of physical harm in the event of an attack. Some actions could be as simple as locking doors, closing shutters and identifying a safe route to cover.

Direct financial support for mitigating measures is not proposed. However, the Government will consider how and where it can otherwise support those in scope, for example through developing supporting tools, guidance and templates where appropriate, and considering how training needs can be supported. The guidance and support is being designed so that it is self-explanatory and easy to follow.

Claire Hanna: [\[16308\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill on (a) charities, (b) community groups and (c) voluntary organisations that organise events.

Dan Jarvis:

The Government is extremely mindful of the many community, voluntary-run and charity events that occur across the UK.

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill has been designed to achieve public protection outcomes whilst avoiding undue burden on businesses and other organisations.

Many organisations will have procedures and measures in place for fire safety and health and safety legislation. This Bill's proposals are based on similar concepts, following similar systems and processes. The 'reasonably practicable' standard of requirements in both tiers is designed to allow procedures and measures to be tailored to the specific circumstances of a premises or event. This will enable those responsible to consider what is within their control and the resources they have available to them, as well as what is suitable and appropriate for their premises or event.

Dedicated guidance and support will be provided for those in scope of the Bill, to ensure that they have the required information on what to do and how best to do it. The guidance will be easy to follow, needing no particular expertise.

Claire Hanna: [\[16309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department will provide (a) guidance and (b) practical support to (i) charities, (ii) community groups and (iii) voluntary groups to assist them in complying with the requirements of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.

Dan Jarvis:

Free, dedicated guidance and support will be provided to ensure that those in scope will understand how to meet the obligations of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill. Guidance is currently being designed so that it is self-explanatory and easy to follow. It will be published ahead of the Bill's requirements coming into force.

The Bill requires the production of two separate pieces of guidance: statutory guidance for the public to understand how they can meet the requirements of the legislation; and operational guidance which will set out how the regulator will discharge its duties. This will be freely available on the Security Industry Authority website and Gov.uk.

We continue to engage with key stakeholders across relevant sectors including those in the voluntary and community sector in developing this guidance.

In the interim, factsheets have been published on gov.uk which provide more detailed information on certain elements of the Bill [Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Bill 2024: factsheets - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). We also continue to encourage referral to the [ProtectUK](#) platform for the latest updates on the Bill.

■ Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe: [\[16287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 26 November to Question 14345 on Undocumented Migrants, if she will make it her policy to publish data on the number of asylum seekers for whom her Department does not have an address.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Honourable Member to the Answer I gave on 27 November to his Question UIN 15076.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Age Assurance

Rupert Lowe: [\[16274\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department takes to help determine the ages of irregular migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Where an individual claims to be a child without any documentary evidence, and where there is reason to doubt their claimed age, immigration officers are required to make an initial age decision to determine whether the individual should be treated as a child or an adult. This is an important first step to prevent individuals who are clearly an adult or child from being subjected unnecessarily to a more substantive age assessment and ensure that individuals are swiftly routed to the correct process.

Current guidance provides that immigration officers may only treat that individual as an adult where that individual has no credible and clear documentary evidence proving their age, and two members of Home Office staff assess that their physical appearance and demeanour very strongly suggests that the individual is 'significantly over 18.'

Where that threshold is not met, but there remains doubt about the individual's age, they will be treated as a child, and transferred to a local authority for further consideration of their age. This often involves a further, more comprehensive age assessment if deemed necessary. This approach to initial decisions on age has been considered by the Supreme Court in *BF (Eritrea) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2021] UKSC 38 and held to be lawful.

■ Undocumented Migrants: Crimes of Violence

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16286\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11414 on Undocumented Migrants: Crimes of Violence, if she will make it her policy to publish data on (a) recorded incidents of assault against her Department's staff and (b) a breakdown of the immigration status of the perpetrators of such assaults.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer I gave on 27 November to question UIN 15076.

■ Visas: Digital Technology

Daisy Cooper:

[\[16311\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support older people without internet access to (a) apply for and (b) access eVisas.

Daisy Cooper:

[\[16312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that (a) older people and (b) people with legacy visas are not (i) disadvantaged and (ii) prevented from accessing services by the eVisa system.

Seema Malhotra:

The Home Office is committed to ensuring everyone, including the elderly, those who hold legacy documents and the most vulnerable, are properly supported as we transform our immigration system. I have recently met with Age UK and other stakeholders to discuss how we can ensure support is reaching those who need it.

People can nominate a 'helper' and give them limited access to their account, so that they can assist with creating a UKVI account, completing details to access an eVisa, and with any immigration application. Where a person is unable to manage their own affairs due to, for example, age or disability, a 'proxy', who is authorised, can create and manage the account on behalf of the person. People can also contact the UK Visas and Immigration Resolution Centre (<https://www.gov.uk/contact-ukvi-inside-outside-uk>) for support via email and webchat, and telephone. They can also support people through the online process by helping them to access or recover their account, update their personal details and assisting them with technical issues with their online immigration status, and where necessary, verify the person's status through alternative means.

For those inside the UK our Assisted Digital service is available to provide support by phone and email to those who need help with IT-related aspects of creating a UKVI account. Access needs can include any disability that requires support to use online services, a lack of device or a lack of internet access. More information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/assisted-digital-help-online-application>.

We are also developing services to make the relevant immigration status information available automatically through system to system checks with other government departments and the NHS.

On 18 September 2024, we announced that the Government is providing up to £4m in dedicated grant funding to a UK wide network of voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver valuable support to those who need it, during the transition from physical immigration documents to eVisas. The list of organisations is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evisa-community-support-for-vulnerable-people>.

We encourage holders of legacy paper documents, including passports that contain an ink stamp or vignette sticker (for those with Indefinite Leave to Enter or Indefinite Leave to Remain), to transition to an eVisa given the benefits this offers. They can do this by making a free 'No Time Limit' application via: [GOV.UK - The best place to find government services and information \(homeoffice.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/services-and-information). However, Legacy document holders can prove their rights as they do today using their physical documents where these are permitted. This includes for proving the right to rent, or for travel to the UK.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Buildings: Insulation

Mike Amesbury: [\[16203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the National Audit Office's report entitled Dangerous cladding: the government's remediation portfolio, published on 4 November 2024.

Mike Amesbury: [\[16204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the National Audit Office's report entitled Dangerous cladding: the government's remediation portfolio, published on 4 November 2024; and whether she plans to take steps to tackle high insurance premiums on flats affected by building safety defects.

Alex Norris:

My officials and I have carefully considered the National Audit Office's recommendations and expect to come before the Public Accounts Committee next year.

The Deputy Prime Minister will also set out shortly, further steps on remediation, as promised by the Prime Minister on 4th September 2024, following publication of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry final report.

Buildings insurance premiums remain high for many leaseholders in buildings with fire safety issues, who have been paying too much for too long.

The Fire Safety Reinsurance Facility, led by the Association of British Insurers (ABI) and reinsurance broker McGill and Partners, launched in April 2024. The Facility aims to increase capacity in the market and may reduce high premiums for some of the most affected multi-occupancy buildings with fire safety issues.

The Government has been monitoring the use and impact of the Facility and will provide an update in due course.

■ Buildings: Safety

Mike Amesbury: [\[16205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department collects on the number of buildings where residents have been decanted due to building safety concerns.

Mike Amesbury: [\[16206\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department collects once building safety enforcement action has been taken by local regulators; and if she will make an estimate of the number of buildings where (a) residents have been subsequently decanted from their homes and (b) a waking watch has been subsequently installed at leaseholders' cost in the last 12 months.

Alex Norris:

Decants arise in one of two ways – either in a planned way as part of a schedule of works or as an emergency situation due to emerging safety concerns. Not all decants are reported to the department, particularly if they are planned. Emergency decants are a local operational matter led either by the entity responsible for the building or local regulators. Where emergency decants are reported to the department we work with local regulators and responsible entities to ensure residents are placed at the centre of decision making by all parties. In the past 12 months' six emergency decants have been reported to the department, three of which took place as a result of enforcement action. The department also works collaboratively with local regulators and other parties to prevent decants from taking place and in the past 12 months this work has allowed over 1500 households to remain in their homes safely.

When local authorities take enforcement action against a mid or high-rise residential building the department asks the local authority to voluntarily upload details to a designated data platform. Local authorities share details of buildings subject to enforcement under powers within the 2004 Housing Act, including inspections, information gathering notices and statutory notices requiring action (such as improvement and prohibition notices). Local authorities can also share data pertaining to remediation orders and remediation contribution orders under the Building Safety Act 2022. We publish enforcement information as part of the monthly remediation data release here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/building-safety-remediation>.

The department does not collect comprehensive data on the number of buildings requiring a waking watch due to enforcement for building safety failures, nor where

the costs of the waking watch fall as a result of enforcement action taken by local regulators.

■ Council Tax Benefits

Carla Denyer:

[\[16317\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take legislative steps to reinstate Council Tax Benefit.

Jim McMahon:

The Government has no current plans to reinstate Council Tax Benefit.

■ Grenfell Tower Inquiry

Mike Amesbury:

[\[16221\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent progress her Department has made on implementing the recommendations in the phase (a) one and (b) two reports of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

Alex Norris:

The Government has overseen progress against Phase 1 and has committed to publishing regular progress updates on the relevant section of gov.uk, with a final update due to be published in the new year. Of the Inquiry's 46 Phase 1 recommendations, all but one have now been considered and addressed, with the final fire and rescue service recommendation due to be addressed by the end of the year.

On phase 2, it is of course important that government carefully considers the Inquiry's findings and recommendations in full. The Prime Minister has indicated that the government will respond to the inquiry's recommendations within six months, and update Parliament annually on progress against every commitment made.

■ Grenfell Tower: Fires

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[16196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department's practice is on ministerial attendance at (a) meetings and (b) conferences (i) sponsored and (ii) connected to firms associated with the Grenfell Tower fire.

Alex Norris:

The government has written to firms associated with the failing identified by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, as the first step to stopping them being awarded government contracts. While this process continues, Ministers within my department will avoid meetings and events associated with firms identified as contributing to these horrific failings through their systematic dishonesty and manipulative practices.

■ Homelessness

Mike Amesbury:

[\[16210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what discussions she has had with (a) mayors and (b) local authorities in the level of support provided to local government help tackle (i) rough sleeping and (ii) other homelessness in the Autumn Budget 2024.

Rushanara Ali:

We are already taking the first steps to get back on track to ending homelessness. As announced at the Budget, funding for homelessness services is increasing next year by £233 million compared to this year (2024/25). This increased spending will help to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping. This brings total spend to nearly £1 billion in 25/26.

We have 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, and engages regularly with mayors and councils.

■ Local Government Finance

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[16191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, by what dates her Department is required to (a) publish and (b) ratify the local government finance settlement for 2025-26; and what the deadlines are for local authorities to publish their (i) budget and (ii) council tax requirements for 2025-26.

Jim McMahon:

Precepting authorities must set their council tax by 1 March each year and billing authorities must set their council tax by 11 March. Within 21 days of setting their council tax, billing authorities are required to publish details of the total council tax charges in their area. There are no set dates by which the Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) must be published.

To allow councils to set their budgets in good time, ahead of the 1 March deadline for setting council tax bills, the Department should publish and put before Parliament the final Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26 before the end of February 2025.

■ Local Government: Productivity

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[16200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2024 to Question 7823 on Local Government: Productivity, if she will publish that letter.

Jim McMahon:

As noted in my answer to Question [7823](#) on 16 October 2024, I wrote to all councils to acknowledge the productivity plans submitted after the election, and to thank them for developing innovative efficiency solutions. I was clear that I will not micromanage councils going forward and I am committed to working together to explore how we can make better use of existing resources.

The department does not routinely publish letters issued to local authorities and we will not be publishing the letter in this instance.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Consultation**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[16194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which consultations launched in her Department by the previous Government have closed but have not yet received a substantive Government response, in the context of the Cabinet Office's publication entitled Consultation principles: guidance, last updated in March 2018.

Kevin Hollinrake:[\[16492\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 October 2024 to Question 5412 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Consultation, how many officials in her Department are employed to work specifically on consultations.

Kevin Hollinrake:[\[16493\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 11 October 2024 to Question 5412 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Consultation, if she will list the consultation documents that closed between 4 July 2022 and 4 July 2024 that have not yet received a formal response.

Alex Norris:

This government is committed to using consultations and other forms of public engagement to support effective decision-making and delivery. We will respond to all consultations in a timely manner, in line with agreed deadlines.

Within MHCLG, responsibility for managing consultations primarily sits with the relevant individual policy team. No staff are therefore specifically employed to work on consultations.

Information relating to consultations under the previous administration cannot be provided, as it is not held centrally and collating it would result in a disproportionate cost to the department.

■ Prisoners' Release: Homelessness**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[16197\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the early release of prisoners on levels of homelessness.

Rushanara Ali:

Prisons, probation and local authorities worked closely together to mitigate the risk of homelessness during the standard determinate sentence (SDS40) release scheme. MHCLG is working closely with the MoJ to build on lessons learned through SDS40.

The MoJ is currently collating data relating to the September and October SDS release dates and this will be published.

■ Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[16198\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her policy is on facilitating the use of the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre by Parliament during its Restoration and Renewal Programme.

Alex Norris:

There is no policy or agreement in place with the Houses of Parliament on using the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre during the Restoration and Renewal Programme. However, the Government continues to work with Parliament on the Restoration and Renewal Programme ahead of proposals coming to the House in 2025.

■ Recovery Strategy Unit**Mike Amesbury:** [\[16207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the objectives are for the Recovery Strategy Unit; and how many live cases it is processing.

Alex Norris:

In April 2022, the Building Safety Act was passed, providing a range of new powers to hold to account those responsible for unsafe buildings. The Recovery Strategy Unit uses those new powers to:

- a) expose and pursue the most egregious actors, to ensure that organisations and individuals are held to account for their building safety failings;
- b) promote wider behaviour change across the sector; and
- c) test legislation in practice so learning can be fed back into the process.

We have successfully obtained 10 Remediation Orders against two freeholders, Grey GR Ltd and Wallace Estates Ltd, ensuring that they remediate their homes within committed timescales. The department is now pursuing legal action to secure Remediation Contribution Orders for 12 buildings from Yianis Group, Urban Splash,

and Hollybrook, aiming to recover approximately £72 million, which would otherwise fall on taxpayers or leaseholders.

■ Social Services: Finance

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[16190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 18 October 2024 to Question 8190 on Social Services: Finance, for what reason a decision on council tax (a) referendums and (b) associated thresholds will not be taken until the spending review, in the context of earlier timetabling requirements for the 2025-26 local government finance settlement.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[16202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will set council tax referendum thresholds for 2025-26.

Jim McMahon:

The government has published the local government finance policy statement setting out referendum thresholds for 2025-26. This is available [here](#).

JUSTICE

■ Community Orders

Claire Young: [\[16353\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of incentivising people serving non-violent custodial sentences to undertake more community service work.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Prisoners serving non-violent custodial sentences currently can access community service work through Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) during the custodial element of their sentence. Prisoners are eligible to be considered for ROTL once they have served at least half of the custodial element of their sentence, provided they are within two years of release, or once they transfer to an open prison.

ROTL is an important rehabilitation tool which allows prisoners to participate in activities in the community which have been identified as serving a particular purpose in meeting their individual resettlement objectives. Suitable, risk assessed prisoners may be allowed out during the day to, for example: work, attend college, attend an interview or maintain/re-establish links with their family. This helps them develop responsibility and gain valuable skills so that they can turn their lives around upon leaving prison.

■ Ministry of Justice: Policy

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[16815\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how their Department defines strategy.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The definition is detailed in the Functional Standards Common Glossary, which is published on the gov.uk website.

■ **Pre-sentence Reports****Liz Saville Roberts:**[\[16972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) standard delivery, (b) fast delivery, and (c) oral pre-sentence reports have been produced in (i) Wales and (ii) England in each of the last 10 years.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) provide an expert assessment of the nature and causes of the offender's behaviour, the risk the offender poses and to whom, as well as an independent recommendation of the options available to support the independent judiciary in deciding the appropriate sentence. The decision on whether to direct the preparation of a PSR and any adjournment to produce that report is, along with the sentence itself, a matter for the independent judiciary. Since 2014, the following numbers of PSRs have been produced in Wales and England:

Wales

TYPE	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Wales total	10,470	10,385	9,297	8,134	7,915	7,357	6,097	6,221	5,943	6,488
Standard Delivery PSR	1,230	976	603	425	413	438	433	520	442	585
Fast Delivery PSR written	4,942	5,593	4,257	4,004	3,903	2,796	2,882	3,306	3,339	3,680
Fast Delivery PSR oral	4,298	3,816	4,437	3,705	3,599	4,123	2,782	2,395	2,162	2,223

England

TYPE	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
England total	131,462	148,893	138,999	121,508	105,313	95,647	61,980	82,436	77,297	84,880
Standard Delivery PSR	32,523	24,774	8,993	4,314	3,292	2,848	2,132	3,028	3,119	4,374
Fast Delivery PSR written	64,078	76,934	58,720	45,411	39,419	41,833	39,970	59,217	55,036	61,979
Fast Delivery PSR oral	34,861	47,185	71,286	71,783	62,602	50,966	19,878	20,191	19,142	18,527

1. Excludes breach, deferred sentence and court review reports (for further details please see the guide to offender management statistics, available at: [Offender management statistics quarterly - GOV.UK](#)).
1. Between April and June 2020, the number of cases processed at the criminal courts was substantially reduced as a result of the operational restrictions that were put in place on 23 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the impact of these operational restrictions continued into subsequent periods, the figures in more recent periods have recovered to pre-pandemic levels.
1. The figures for England include a handful of pre-sentence reports prepared by the National Security Division (NSD), which was introduced in 2021 under the Probation Reform Programme and is specifically tasked with the enhanced monitoring of terrorists, serious organised criminals and very high-risk offenders.

Data quality: The figures in these tables have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large-scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Data source: National Delius case management system

Information on the numbers of PSRs for England and Wales is published as part of the Ministry of Justice's official statistics available at: [Offender management statistics quarterly - GOV.UK](#).

■ Probation**Liz Saville Roberts:** [\[16974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what percentage of people subject to supervision by the Probation Service have (a) one, (b) two, (c) three, (d) four and (e) five or more named supervising officers during the course of their order or licence.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The information requested is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

■ Visas: Married People**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[16965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 22 November 2024 to Question 14161, what her Department's timetable is for its consideration of marriage law in England and Wales.

Alex Davies-Jones:

Marriage law is an issue of great importance and one which therefore requires careful consideration. The Law Commission's report on weddings raises a number of issues around weddings law, and as a new Government we need to take the time to consider these carefully before setting out our position, which we will do in due course.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE**■ Written Questions: Government Responses****Mr Richard Holden:** [\[16339\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the performance of the Government in providing answers to (a) correspondence and (b) written parliamentary questions since 4 July 2024.

Lucy Powell:

Parliament has a right to hold Ministers to account. We recognise there is room for improvement upon the record of the previous government, and we are committed to doing things differently. As Leader of the House, I have written to all members of Cabinet to remind Ministers of their responsibilities to provide helpful and timely responses to Members' PQs and correspondence.

This Government has already taken steps to strengthen its approach to correspondence, with a Ministerial champion for correspondence in each department. Data on each Government department's correspondence performance in 2024 will be published on GOV.UK in the usual way (available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/data-on-responses-to-correspondence-from-mps-and-peers>).

As a member of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member will be aware that the Committee monitors individual department's PQ performance and that it recently launched an inquiry into performance in the 2023–24 Session. I look forward to working with the Committee on this and other matters.

I would encourage hon. Members to raise any specific issues they may have with myself and my office.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ **Internet: Offences against Children**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[16183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 21 November 2024 to Question 14202, whether Ministers in his Department have had recent meetings with representatives of (a) Meta, (b) Snap inc. and (c) X.

Feryal Clark:

The Government meets regularly with a range of stakeholders related to online safety, including social media platforms, to discuss implementation of the Online Safety Act, and the duties it will place on services to tackle illegal content, and content harmful to children, on their sites.

Ministerial meetings and engagements are published through quarterly transparency reports on gov.uk.

■ **Military Aid: Ukraine**

Samantha Niblett:

[\[16630\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of supporting Ukraine through the use of joint (a) technology, (b) funding and (c) research initiatives.

Feryal Clark:

The Government recognises the key role that science, technology, and innovation will play in Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and future economy. The department fosters collaboration between researchers and innovators in both countries to our mutual benefit, working closely with other departments, such as Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Department for Business and Trade. For example, providing financial support to the UK-Ukraine Techbridge and supporting Ukrainian researchers through the Researchers at Risk Programme. We are continuing to work with partners to identify areas for future collaboration and support.

■ Offences against Children: Pornography

Suella Braverman: [16230]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he plans to include safeguards to prevent AI-generated child sexual abuse in the forthcoming AI Bill.

Suella Braverman: [16231]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the companies developing the most powerful AI models on introducing safeguards to ensure their models cannot generate child sexual abuse material.

Feryal Clark:

AI generated child sexual abuse images are illegal material. It is an offence to produce, store or share any material that contains or depicts child sexual abuse, regardless of whether the material depicts a real child or not. The government engages regularly with the tech sector, including AI companies, to support them in making their platforms safer for children.

The Online Safety Act places new duties on companies that provide user-to-user services and search services to address priority illegal content, such as child sexual exploitation and abuse. The strongest protections in the Act are for children.

■ Project Gigabit and Shared Rural Network

Chi Onwurah: [16153]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 14940, on Project Gigabit and Shared Rural Network, how Ofcom tests areas for compliance with their standard for good coverage.

Chris Bryant:

Ofcom's approach to testing compliance is available on Ofcom's website.

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-and-broadband/coverage-and-speeds/cellular-coverage/>

It involves a combination of desk-based assessment against the mobile network operators (MNO) coverage predictions and drive testing in a sample of locations across the UK.

Ofcom uses scanners installed in vehicles to capture a range of information including mobile signal strength across the UK's road network. This provides signal strength measurement samples for each MNO across different regions and terrains. This data is then used for comparison at an aggregated level with the coverage predictions the MNOs supply to Ofcom.

SCOTLAND■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]****Joani Reid:**[\[901536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help create defence jobs in Scotland.

Ian Murray:

Scotland's defence industry is vital to the UK's security and economy. The newly published Defence Industrial Strategy is clear that this government will prioritise UK-based defence firms, including those in Scotland.

As part of Brand Scotland, I have been promoting the Scottish defence industry in Norway and in South-East Asia, where I visited HMS Spey, constructed by BAE Systems on the Clyde.

I welcome the announcement by BAE Systems that they will be investing £1 billion in education and skills across the UK, which will lead to more than 200 jobs in Glasgow.

Chris Murray:[\[901541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what recent progress he has made with Cabinet colleagues on the green energy transition in Scotland.

Torcuil Crichton:[\[901543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what recent progress he has made with Cabinet colleagues on the green energy transition in Scotland.

Ian Murray:

I have been working closely with my cabinet colleagues to achieve our clean energy Mission.

Scotland has a huge role to play, not least through GB Energy - headquartered in Aberdeen and backed with £8.3bn. It will work to deliver clean energy, lower bills, and bring the jobs of the future to all parts of Scotland.

This is on top of the largest ever Contracts for Difference round and the National Wealth Fund, which will mobilise billions into our world-leading clean energy industries.

Brendan O'Hara:[\[901542\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the potential impact of recent changes to the Winter Fuel Payment on pensioners in Scotland.

Kirsty McNeill:

This Government is supporting pensioners through increasing pension credit uptake and protecting the triple lock. This means an increase in the state pension for a million Scottish pensioners of up to £470 next year, on top of up to £900 this year.

This year marks twenty five years since the previous Labour Government delivered devolution in Scotland, one of its proudest achievements. I understand the SNP Government plans to use some of their record budget settlement to make different choices on this devolved policy area - that's devolution in action. The Honourable Gentleman may wish to ask himself how he can justify voting against Scotland getting that record settlement.

■ Whisky: Scotland

Seamus Logan: [\[16854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to alcohol duties on Scotch whisky at the Autumn Budget 2024 on the Government's plans for Brand Scotland.

Ian Murray:

I am proud to champion Scotland's products and services, including whisky, globally through Brand Scotland. I have just returned from a visit to South East Asia where I was pleased to support the Scotch Whisky industry at a range of meetings with industry and Government in this key market. 90% of Scotch Whisky is already exported and therefore pays no duty. Increases on duty are in line with inflation and under the previous Government, duty was increased by 10.1% following the duty review. This does not detract from my support of the industry and I will continue to work closely with it to maximise opportunities and growth through Brand Scotland.

TRANSPORT

■ A35: Floods

Vikki Slade: [\[16651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what meetings her officials had with the then hon. member for Mid Dorset and North Poole on flooding at Bakers Arms Roundabout on the A35 during the last Parliament; and what agreements were made to consider measures to resolve the issue.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department has no record of meetings on this matter during the last Parliament.

■ Air Traffic Control: Licensing

Paul Holmes: [\[16350\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress her Department is making on amending regulations to allow for recognition of non-UK Air Traffic Controller licences.

Mike Kane:

The government currently has no plans to amend regulations to allow for the recognition of non-UK Air Traffic Controller licences.

Paul Holmes:

[\[16351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress her Department is making on amending regulations to allow for the conversion of military Air Traffic Controller licences to civil Air Traffic Controller licences.

Mike Kane:

The government has no plans to amend regulations to allow for the conversion of military Air Traffic Controller licences to civil Air Traffic Controller licences.

■ **Freight Council**

Grahame Morris:

[\[16477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when she plans to convene the next meeting of the Department for Transport's Freight Council.

Lilian Greenwood:

Our ambition is for the Freight Council to bring leaders from the freight and logistics sector together with government to agree priorities and actions, so that freight plays its full part in growing our economy. We have been considering the best Council format to achieve this and will confirm this in due course.

■ **Heathrow Airport: Railways**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[16184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department has had recent discussions with representatives of (a) Heathrow Airport, (b) Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and (c) Network Rail on a potential western rail link to Heathrow.

Lilian Greenwood:

Officials from my Department met with representatives of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce during the summer to discuss the business case for the Western Rail Link to Heathrow. There have not been recent meetings with Heathrow Airport Ltd and Network Rail about the scheme.

■ **London Northwestern Railway: Standards**

Paula Barker:

[\[16556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the performance of London Northwestern Railway.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department constantly scrutinise performance and challenge West Midlands Trains, who manage the performance of London Northwestern Railway. The Rail Minister has met with WMT to reiterate that improving performance is a key priority for DfT and we hold WMT to account for delivering it.

■ London, Tilbury and Southend Line: Repairs and Maintenance**Mr Richard Holden:** [\[16349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans her Department has for the replacement of the overhead lines on the C2C train route.

Simon Lightwood:

The renewal of overhead lines on the c2c route will require significant investment. Network Rail is making plans to secure the funding in future control periods.

■ Northern Trains: Standards**Paula Barker:** [\[16555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the performance of Northern Rail.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State has made clear to Northern's management that its current performance is unacceptable. That is why we issued the company with a breach of contract notice and required it to develop a recovery plan. Ministers and officials regularly meet Northern's management to drive performance improvements across its network.

■ Railway Stations: Safety**Shaun Davies:** [\[16321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to help improve the safety of platform train interfaces at train stations.

Lilian Greenwood:

Working with the industry, the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) has developed a comprehensive strategy to improve safety at the platform train interface (PTI) on the mainline railway. The strategy adopts a whole-system, safety by design, risk-based approach; which includes using human factors and data modelling to inform the design of infrastructure and rolling stock, launching safety campaigns such as 'Respect the Edge' to influence passenger behaviour and improve awareness of risks, and enhancing the skills and competence of dispatchers and guards by working with operators and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to improve the quality of training and guidance available to staff. This approach has seen PTI incidences decreasing year on year since 2020/2021.

■ Railways: Nationalisation**Chi Onwurah:** [\[16157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of maintaining regional livery designs as railway franchises are brought back into public ownership.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department has not assessed the potential merits of maintaining regional livery designs as railway franchises are brought back into public ownership.

■ **Railways: Timetables****Paula Barker:**[\[16554\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of short notice changes to the timetable on the rail network.

Simon Lightwood:

The department is aware that short notice changes have been occurring due to factors such as incidences of infrastructure issues and traincrew shortages – with a shortage of traincrew causing a high proportion of these short notice changes. The department is working with train operators and Network Rail to address these issues.

■ **Roads: South Derbyshire****Samantha Niblett:**[\[16627\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to help reduce road traffic incidents in South Derbyshire constituency.

Lilian Greenwood:

Since the general election, the Department has begun work on a new Road Safety Strategy, the first in over a decade. The Department will share more details in due course.

Local government is the main delivery agent of road safety. The responsibility to implement, fund, deliver, promote and enforce local road safety initiatives remains with the Local Authorities under the 1988 Road Traffic Act.

■ **Transport for Wales: Overcrowding****Paula Barker:**[\[16558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment has she made of overcrowding on Transport for Wales trains.

Simon Lightwood:

The specification, management and performance of Transport for Wales train services are devolved matters for Welsh Ministers.

TREASURY■ **Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Wendy Morton:**[\[16240\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to (a) agricultural property relief and (b) business property relief

announced in the Autumn Budget 2024 on (i) abattoirs, (ii) butchers, (iii) agricultural retailers, (iv) agricultural machinery retailers and (v) other agriculture-related businesses.

Wendy Morton: [16241]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to Agricultural Property Relief and Business Property Relief on (a) arable, (b) livestock and (c) hill farms.

Wendy Morton: [16242]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to (a) Agricultural Property Relief and (b) Business Property Relief on trends in the sale of agricultural land assets.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27, with around half of those being claims that involve AIM shares. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (including those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) each year are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Farmers: Inheritance Tax

Manuela Perteghella: [16609]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has conducted an impact assessment on the potential impact of changes to agricultural property relief on tenant farmers.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 520 estates will claim APR (including those that also claim for BPR) and will be impacted by these changes in 2026-27. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (or those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) each year are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Hospitality Industry and Leisure: Business Rates

Dame Caroline Dinenage:

[\[16139\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the level of business rates relief for hospitality, leisure and entertainment businesses on such businesses.

James Murray:

Without any government intervention, Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) relief would have ended entirely in April 2025, creating a cliff-edge for businesses. Instead, the Government has decided to offer a 40 per cent discount to RHL properties up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business in 2025-26 and frozen the small business multiplier.

By tapering RHL relief to 40%, rather than letting it end, the government has saved the average pub, with a rateable value (RV) of £16,800, over £3,300 in 2025.

At Budget, the Government also announced that from 2026-27, it intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for high street RHL properties. This permanent tax cut will ensure that they benefit from much-needed certainty and support. The Government intends to fund this by introducing a higher multiplier on the most valuable properties, which includes the majority of large distribution warehouses, including warehouses used by online giants.

The rates for any new business rate multipliers will be set at Budget 2025 so that the Government can take into account the upcoming revaluation outcomes as well as the economic and fiscal context.

■ Infrastructure: Finance

Andrew Rosindell:

[\[16144\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when she plans to publish the 10-year National Infrastructure Strategy; and whether she plans to adopt the recommendations of the National Infrastructure Commission's National Infrastructure Assessment, published on 18 October 2023.

Darren Jones:

The government will publish a 10-year infrastructure strategy next spring alongside the 2025 Spending Review. This will set out the government's long-term plans for infrastructure and address the recommendations of the National Infrastructure Commission's Second National Infrastructure Assessment.

■ Inheritance Tax: Public Consultation

Joe Robertson:

[\[16376\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will launch a public consultation on the proposed changes to business property relief.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to business property relief at www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

The Government will publish a technical consultation in early 2025. This will focus on the detailed application of the allowance to lifetime transfers into trusts and charges on trust property. This will inform the legislation to be included in a future Finance Bill.

■ Military Bases: Diego Garcia**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:****[16185]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 22 November 2024 to Question 14333, from which Department's budget funding related to the proposed lease of the military base on Diego Garcia will be allocated; whether additional Treasury funding will be provided for that purpose; and whether she has had discussions with US counterparts on funding for the costs of the base.

Darren Jones:

The UK-Mauritius treaty enabling the continued operation of the base on Diego Garcia is still subject to finalisation and signature. The government will lay it before parliament for scrutiny and intends to introduce necessary implementation legislation before it will enter into force. No payments will be made until the treaty is legally binding.

Financial obligations arising from this agreement, including departmental budgetary responsibilities, will be managed responsibly within the government's fiscal framework.

The military base on Diego Garcia is a joint UK-US facility and an essential part of the UK-US relationship. While the UK and Mauritius are the only signatories to the treaty, the US will continue to contribute to the operating costs of the base.

■ National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority**Andrew Rosindell:****[16130]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her planned timetable is for the creation of the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority.

Darren Jones:

The government will introduce the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA), which will combine the functions of the NIC and IPA and bring oversight of strategy and delivery under one roof. NISTA will be operational by spring 2025 and will implement the government's 10-year infrastructure strategy in conjunction with industry, while driving more effective delivery of infrastructure across the country.

■ Small Businesses: Taxation

Jim Shannon:

[16160]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of recent tax increases on small and medium businesses.

James Murray:

The Government inherited a very difficult fiscal situation and so we are asking businesses to contribute to fixing the public finances and our public services.

At the Autumn Budget, the Government announced tax reforms to support smaller businesses. Including, more than doubling the employment allowance to £10,500; committing in the Corporate Tax Roadmap to maintain the Small Profits Rate and marginal relief at their current rates and thresholds, as well as maintaining the Annual Investment Allowance; and freezing the small businesses multiplier for 2025/26. In the transition to permanently lower business rates burden for the high street, through lower multipliers for Retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) businesses from April 2026, RHL business rates relief will also be extended for one year at 40% (up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business). If the Government had not acted, the current RHL relief would have ended entirely in April 2025.

■ Tourism: Taxation

Claire Young:

[16352]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on the potential impact of a tax on tourism.

James Murray:

We have no plans to introduce a tax on tourism.

■ Treasury: Aviation

Rupert Lowe:

[16319]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many international (a) air miles and (b) flights have been completed by (i) her and (ii) staff in her office since 5 July 2024.

James Murray:

The Chancellor and her Private Office staff have completed three international trips since 5 July 2024.

Further details for international flights will be published in the usual way in due course on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Department for Work and Pensions: Policy**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[16811\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how their Department defines strategy.

Andrew Western:

The definition is detailed in the Functional Standards Common Glossary, which is published on the gov.uk website.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Sexual Harassment

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [\[16326\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many incidents of sexual harassment have been formally reported in her Department in each of the last five years; and what steps her Department is taking to estimate the number of such cases that are unreported.

Andrew Western:

All formal cases of harassment, bullying and discrimination are required to be flagged with the DWP's expert HR Investigation Service. In the past year (Dec 23 - Nov 24) the HR Investigation Service has investigated 24 cases of alleged sexual harassment.

DWP is currently defending Employment Tribunal 34 cases, lodged within the past two years, with harassment as one of the heads of claim. The ET1 claim form specifies only "harassment" so the 34 cases include cases of harassment on grounds other than sexual harassment.

DWP has improved data collation and insight over the past year. Data for each of the past 5 years can only be provided at disproportionate cost as it would require collecting data from local managers across the Department.

DWP has not taken formal steps to estimate the number of cases of sexual harassment that are unreported. DWP attaches the highest priority to investigating allegations of alleged sexual harassment and will always listen sensitively to employees raising concerns about alleged harassment and ensure they are fully supported. There are a number of alternative routes for possible reporting of concerns and these are regularly publicised to all colleagues

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [\[16327\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average length of time is in her Department to conclude investigations into reports of sexual harassment; and what steps her Department takes to ensure that this process is conducted (a) promptly and (b) thoroughly.

Andrew Western:

To identify the time taken to investigate all cases specifically alleging sexual harassment would require gathering information from across DWP managers and would therefore incur disproportionate cost. For cases investigated by our expert HR Investigation Service, the average time taken to investigate a complaint and reach a decision is 14 weeks.

DWP attaches the highest priority to rigorously investigating allegations of alleged sexual harassment and will always listen sensitively to employees raising concerns about alleged harassment and ensure they are fully supported. All allegations of sexual harassment are required to be notified to the DWP HR Investigation Service, DWP's in house expert investigation team. The team investigate the most serious and complex cases, with other cases being investigated either by one of a pool of independent trained investigators drawn from across the Department, or by local managers. If the HR Investigation Service team are not personally investigating, they provide support investigators. Senior managers in the work area are also required to monitor progress of investigations and to keep all concerned informed of progress. All investigations are completed in line with DWP policy and standard, with a suite of advisory videos, template reports and guidance for those conducting investigations.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Staff**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[16393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether the additional 500 staff deployed to process Pension Credit applications were new employees.

Emma Reynolds:

Since the announcement to means test Winter Fuel payments, to date we have increased the resource in Pension Credit claims by approximately 500 staff through a combination of internal redeployments, use of external providers and external recruitment. This is in line with the overall resourcing plan for Pension Credit claims and Winter Fuel payments.

■ Household Support Fund: Pensioners**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[16399\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the Household Support Fund in supporting pensioners with the cost of living in winter 2024-25.

Mr Peter Bedford:[\[16400\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the amount local authorities will spend on supporting pensioners with the cost of living in winter 2024-25.

Emma Reynolds:

No assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the Household Support Fund in supporting pensioners with the cost of living in winter 2024-25 and no estimate has

been made of the amount local authorities will spend on supporting pensioners this winter.

■ Hygiene: Poverty

Ms Julie Minns: [\[16293\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of people have experienced hygiene poverty in (a) England, (b) Cumbria and (c) Carlisle constituency in each of the last five years.

Ms Julie Minns: [\[16294\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of recent trends in the level of hygiene poverty.

Alison McGovern:

Tackling poverty in all forms, from reducing mass dependence on emergency food parcels to ensuring people can afford essentials like hygiene products, is a priority for this government.

We know that good work can significantly reduce the chances of people falling into poverty, but too many people are being denied the security and dignity that comes with being in good work. The Get Britain Working White Paper, published on 26 November, sets out how we will reform employment support, backed by a £240 million investment to target, and tackle the root causes of unemployment and inactivity, and better join up health skills and employment support based on the needs of local communities.

This vital work comes alongside the announcements made at the Autumn budget which delivers an increase to the National Living Wage of 6.7% to £12.21 for eligible workers aged 21 and over, and a rise in the 18-20 National Minimum Wage of 16.3% to £10.00 per hour. This is a record increase and is the first step in the government's plan to create a single adult rate for eligible workers.

We also announced that we are introducing a Fair Repayment Rate for deductions made from a UC award, allowing customers to prioritise their most severe third-party debts and retain more of their benefit award to budget for essentials. Reducing the cap to 15% will benefit 1.2 million households by £420pa on average.

These steps come alongside the £1 billion, including Barnett impact, that will be invested to extend the Household Support Fund (HSF) in England by a full year until 31 March 2026, and to maintain Discretionary Housing Payments in England and Wales. The Household Support Fund can be used, in England, to provide support with food, energy, water and wider essentials including hygiene products.

■ Pension Credit

Mr Peter Bedford: [\[16396\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many Pension Credit applications have been made since 29 July 2024 by constituency.

Emma Reynolds:

We do not currently hold this information at Constituency level.

Data on how many Pension Credit applications made between 1 April 2024 and 22 September 2024 was recently published on gov.uk, [Weekly Pension Credit claims received from 1 April 2024 to 22 September 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/weekly-pension-credit-claims-received-from-1-april-2024-to-22-september-2024).

On 28 October 2024, The Department [announced](#) updated Pension Credit applications and award statistics would be published on 28 November 2024. This publication provides application volumes up to 17 November 2024. [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

This shows we have received around 150,000 applications since the announcement on 29 July to 17 November 2024.

Mr Peter Bedford:**[16398]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the average processing time for Pension Credit applications is by constituency.

Emma Reynolds:

Pension Credit application Average Actual Clearance Times (AACT) are measured weekly.

The information is not available at constituency level.

The table below the most recent national AACT data.

WEEK DATE	28/10/24	04/11/24	11/11/24	18/11/24
PC Claims AACT (Working Days)	56	63	65	65

Please note.

- The AACT is shown rounded to the nearest whole working day.
- The data shown is unpublished management information, collected and intended for internal departmental use and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard.
- These figures will not align to previous PQ responses due to retrospective updates as the data is sourced from live systems.
- DWP currently works to a planned timescale of 50 working days to clear Pension Credit claims.

Steve Darling:**[16827]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people are waiting for their pension credit application to be processed in each constituency.

Emma Reynolds:

We do not hold data requested at constituency level, however the total outstanding Pension Credit claims as at the end of week commencing 18th November 2024 was 91,075. This includes 9,343 advanced claims where the application can be started up to 4 months before reaching State Pension age.

These figures are taken from data held on DWP's Pension Credit system. This is collected for internal departmental operations use only and whilst it is the best source of information available, it is not intended for publication or quality assured to National Statistics standards.

The Department is significantly increasing the resource on Pension Credit to ensure it processes claims as quickly as possible, with over 500 additional staff to support the increase in applications generated from the successful Pension Credit take-up campaign.

If a claim is made by 21 December, Pension Credit can be backdated for three months if the entitlement conditions have been met throughout that period, and if the claimant was eligible, they would also receive a Winter Fuel Payment.

Mr Gregory Campbell:[\[16920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans to run an Invitation to Claim campaign to enable more senior citizens to claim Pension Credit before 21 December 2024.

Emma Reynolds:

The Department's 'Invitation to Claim' initiative was launched on 30 October. Since then, we have written to around 120,000 pensioner households across Great Britain who are in receipt of Housing Benefit but not Pension Credit. The letter and accompanying leaflet urge these households to claim Pension Credit by the 21 December, which is the latest date for making a successful backdated Pension Credit claim and qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment.

The Department's broader communications campaign to promote Pension Credit has been running since September. The latest phase of the campaign is 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.

Pension Credit in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Department for Communities who are undertaking their own take-up activities targeting pensioners.

■ Pension Credit: Publicity**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[16912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she plans further publicity to inform pensioners of the closing date for applications for Pension Credit.

Emma Reynolds:

The Department's campaign to promote Pension Credit has been running across Great Britain since September. The latest phase of the campaign, which launched on 8 November, is aimed at friends and family - especially adult children of eligible pensioners - 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.

We are urging pensioners to apply for Pension Credit by 21 December 2024, which is the latest date for making a successful backdated claim for Pension Credit in order to receive a Winter Fuel Payment (or the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment in Scotland).

Pension Credit in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Department for Communities who are undertaking their own take-up activities targeting pensioners.

■ Pension Credit: South Derbyshire**Samantha Niblett:**[\[16626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to increase the number of people signing up for 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.

The campaign is featured on Greatest Hits Radio East Midlands, Hits Radio East Midlands, and Smooth Radio East Midlands as well as in the Derby Evening Telegraph and across a dozen Post Office and Pharmacy screens in the Derbyshire area.

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.

■ Pensioners: Cost of Living**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[16397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what data her Department holds on steps councils are taking to support pensioners with the cost of living in winter 2024-25.

Emma Reynolds:

The Government does not hold any data on the steps that councils are taking to support pensioners with the cost of living in winter 2024-25.

In England, the Household Support Fund (HSF) is a scheme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and delivered by all Upper Tier Local Authorities to support those most in need with the cost of essentials, such as food, energy and water. The HSF is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need, including households with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people, larger households, single-person households, and those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events. Since October 2022, there has been no ring-fencing of funding for certain groups.

Local Authorities have the discretion to design their own local schemes within the parameters of the guidance and grant determination that the Department for Work and Pensions have set out for the fund. This is because they have the ties and the knowledge to best determine how support should be provided in their local communities.

■ Social Security Benefits: Bank Services**James McMurdock:**[\[16611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department plans to take to monitor the use of powers granting her Department's investigators access to benefit claimants' bank accounts.

James McMurdock:[\[16614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department plans to take to allow benefit claimants to challenge or appeal decisions made based on scrutiny of their bank accounts.

James McMurdock:[\[16703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how data collected from benefit claimants' bank accounts will be used to inform decisions about (a) fraud, (b) eligibility and (c) compliance.

Andrew Western:

Fraud and error in the social security system currently costs the taxpayer almost £10 billion a year and, since the pandemic, a total of £35 billion of taxpayers' money has been incorrectly paid to those not entitled. We are determined to reduce those levels.

As set out by the National Audit Office, access to data is key to prevention and detection of incorrect payments. The Eligibility Verification Measure (EVM) in the

proposed Fraud, Error and Debt Bill will not give DWP access to any bank accounts, nor any information on how claimants spend their money. It will require banks and financial institutions to share limited information with the DWP to help verify benefit eligibility by flagging possible conflicts with eligibility rules – for example the £16,000 capital limit in Universal Credit. The information gathered will help DWP identify incorrect payments, prevent debts from accruing for the claimant and help identify where there may be fraudulent activity.

The legislation will set out key safeguards, including reporting mechanisms and independent oversight. No benefit entitlement decision will be made solely because of the data obtained under EVM and a final decision on benefit entitlement will always involve a human agent. If a claimant wishes to challenge or appeal a benefit decision, they can do so following [DWP's appeals processes](#).

Further details will be set out when the Bill is introduced to Parliament.

James McMurdock:

[\[16612\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the compatibility of plans to access to benefit claimants' bank accounts with existing (a) data protection restrictions and (b) human rights privacy rights.

Andrew Western:

The Eligibility Verification Measure will not give DWP access to any bank accounts, nor any information as to what claimants spend their money on. The proposed new power instead helps verify benefit eligibility, using very limited information from banks and other financial institutions

DWP will ensure that any data is processed and held in compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. The Department routinely handles large volumes of data and has robust security processes in place to manage this. The department will conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment at the appropriate time.

DWP will also ensure that any interference with the rights to private life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights is justified as in accordance with the law and proportionate

James McMurdock:

[\[16617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what types of data would be collected from benefit claimants' bank accounts under the proposed policy.

James McMurdock:

[\[16702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department plans to take to ensure the safe storage of data collected from benefit claimants' bank accounts.

Andrew Western:

The Eligibility Verification Measure (EVM) in the proposed Fraud, Error and Debt Bill will require banks and financial institutions to look within their own data to highlight where someone may not be eligible for the benefits they are receiving. Banks will

share minimal information which will be used by DWP to support further inquiry into potential incorrect payments if there is a possible conflict with the benefit eligibility rules, such as the £16,000 capital limit in Universal Credit or individuals living abroad without notifying the Department.

EVM will not give DWP access to any bank accounts, nor any information on how claimants spend their money. The State Pension will be excluded from the scope of this measure given its near universality and minimal eligibility requirements.

DWP will ensure that any data is processed and held in compliance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Compliance with data protection legislation is also overseen by the Information Commissioner's Office.

The Department routinely handles large volumes of data and has robust security processes in place to manage this. DWP will draw on that experience in designing the processes needed for the EVM and delivery will be built in collaboration with the banking industry to ensure it is as secure as possible. The Department will conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment at the appropriate time.

Further details will be set out when the Bill is introduced to Parliament.

■ Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[16909\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether recipients who have not been suspected of benefit fraudulent activity will be subject to having their personal bank account details scrutinised.

Andrew Western:

Fraud and error in the social security system currently costs the taxpayer almost £10 billion a year and, since the pandemic, a total of £35 billion of taxpayers' money has been incorrectly paid to those not entitled. The DWP is determined to reduce those levels.

The Eligibility Verification Measure (EVM) in the proposed Fraud, Error and Debt Bill will not give DWP access to any bank accounts, nor any information on how claimants spend their money. The proposed new power instead helps verify benefit eligibility, using very limited information from banks and financial institutions. As set out by the National Audit Office, access to data is key to prevention and detection of incorrect payments.

EVM will require banks and financial institutions to look within their own data to highlight where someone may not be eligible for the benefits they are receiving. The data will only be sent to DWP if there is a possible conflict with the benefit eligibility rules, such as the £16,000 capital limit in Universal Credit or individuals living abroad without notifying the Department.

The information gathered will help DWP identify incorrect payments, prevent debts from accruing for the claimant and help identify where there may be fraudulent activity. No benefit entitlement decision will be made solely because of the data

obtained under EVM and a final decision on benefit entitlement will always involve a human agent.

Further details will be set out when the Bill is introduced to Parliament.

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[16911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what reduction in fraud and error in the benefit system she plans to achieve by the end of 2025.

Andrew Western:

At Autumn Budget, the OBR updated their forecasts. This shows the impact of the Department's plans to reduce fraud and error levels across the scorecard period. In addition to this, the Department provides annual updates on the effectiveness of their plans through the publication of the Annual Report and Accounts, where the latest UC forecast and outturn position for the financial year is published. [DWP annual report and accounts 2023 to 2024 \(HTML\) - GOV.UK](#).

Whilst we have published forecasts in the past, they have been superseded and the latest forecast is not in the public domain.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Fraud and Maladministration**

James McMurdock:

[\[16615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of alternative methods to reduce fraud and error in the benefits system that would not involve granting her Department's investigators access to claimants' bank accounts.

James McMurdock:

[\[16616\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to conduct a public consultation on the proposed powers for her Department's investigators to scrutinise benefit claimants' bank accounts.

Andrew Western:

Fraud and error in the social security system currently costs the taxpayer almost £10 billion a year and, since the pandemic, a total of £35 billion of taxpayers' money has been incorrectly paid to those not entitled to the money. This Government will reduce these levels to stop those looking to defraud the system and reduce the risk of individuals building up large overpayments.

The Eligibility Verification Measure, which will allow banks and financial institutions to share limited information with the DWP to help verify benefit eligibility, has been proposed after extensive consideration and policy development as the most effective way to prevent incorrect payments and crucially, help prevent debts accruing for claimants. As the National Audit Office pointed out, access to data is key to prevention and detection of incorrect payments.

The Eligibility Verification Measure will not give DWP powers to access anyone's bank accounts, nor any information on how claimants spend their money. Claimants

fulfilling their responsibilities by promptly and accurately reporting any changes in their circumstances will not be impacted by these changes.

We will ensure that these powers are proportionate by setting out key safeguards, reporting mechanisms and independent oversight, to give greater confidence to claimants that the powers are being used fairly and effectively.

We will rely on Codes of Practice where they already exist and, where they do not, we will consult on and produce new Codes of Practice to provide further reassurance on the safe use of the powers.

Further details will be set out when the Bill is introduced to Parliament.

■ Social Security Benefits: Overpayments

Rupert Lowe:

[\[16667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 27 November 2024 to Question 15043 on Social Security Benefits: Overpayments, what the reason was for the increases in Monetary Value of Fraud and Error between FYE 20 and FYE 21.

Andrew Western:

The Department published a detailed account of its understanding of the reasons for the increase in overpayments in its Annual Report and Accounts for 2020/21.

[HC 422 – Department for Work and Pensions – Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21](#)

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

HOME OFFICE

■ Undocumented Migrants: Crimes of Violence

Rupert Lowe:

[\[11414\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many incidents of assault there were by irregular migrants against her Department's staff in each year since 2018.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 5 November 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Dame Angela Eagle:

As has been the case during successive administrations, this data is not routinely published. We will take every measure possible to keep Home Office

~~Employers~~ **employees** safe at work, and any criminality will face the full force of the law.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

EDUCATION

■ High Needs and Capital Funding

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Minister for Early Education (Stephen Morgan): [\[HCWS282\]](#)

Today I am announcing £740 million of capital investment in 2025-26, to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or who require alternative provision (AP). This is alongside the previously announced additional high needs revenue funding, which will increase by almost £1 billion in 2025-26, compared to 2024-25.

This new funding can be used to adapt classrooms to be more accessible for children with SEND, to create specialist facilities within mainstream schools that can deliver more intensive support adapted to suit the pupils' needs, and create special schools places for pupils with the most complex needs.

Today's funding announcement is part of the broader £6.7bn capital settlement for 2025-26 so we can deliver this government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best start in life. Ensuring schools have the high-quality and sustainable buildings they need is a key part of that.

Allocations of this funding to local authorities are expected to be published by the end of March.

We have also confirmed that we will not enter into any more Safety Valve agreements for councils in financial deficits, pending wider reform of the whole system to prioritise early intervention, properly supporting councils to bring their finances under control. Over time, over 30 local authorities have been supported to manage their high needs budgets through the Safety Valve programme. We will continue to work with LAs with Safety Valve agreements to deliver their plans.

HOME OFFICE

■ eVisas

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Migration and Citizenship (Seema Malhotra): [\[HCWS283\]](#)

The Home Office is developing a border and immigration system that is more digital and streamlined. eVisas - which over 6 million people have been successfully using for several years - are a key part of this transformation and will enhance people's experience and increase the immigration system's security and efficiency. We understand that the move away from physical documents represents a change and that this will be a significant adjustment for many. For this reason, eVisas have, and continue to be, rolled out incrementally and with support available to help customers use the eVisa and online

services. The majority of BRP cards are due to expire on 31st December 2024 and customers are being supported to move to eVisas. We welcome feedback on how we can improve our services and continue to support customers through the roll out.

Benefits of eVisas

It is important to recognise that there are significant benefits from eVisas. Creating a UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) account is free, straightforward and does not change or remove a customer's underlying immigration status. For example, if someone has leave to remain until September 2025 but their Biometric Residence Card (BRP) expires on 31 December 2024, their leave until September 2025 is unaffected. eVisas are secure and cannot be lost, stolen or tampered with, unlike a physical document. They can be accessed anywhere and in real time.

Using their UKVI account, customers can share relevant information about their status securely with third parties, such as employers, landlords, travel operators or private service providers. Customers will also benefit from automated access that government departments and partners, including the Department for Work & Pensions, the NHS, Border Force and carriers will securely have to their immigration status, streamlining processes and access to key services .

An eVisa is like an electronic version of a BRP and is used to view and prove status for example to work or to rent a home. The eVisa is created by the Home Office for each customer to reflect their accurate immigration status, in line with their physical document. The eVisa is then accessed by the customer setting up a UKVI account with their own log-in – a process which has been shown to be very straightforward in the vast majority of cases.

New statistics we are publishing today have shown that over 3.1 million people, mostly with BRPs, have successfully made the transition to eVisas from March to November this year. There are still a proportion of customers who have not yet signed up, and we would strongly encourage them to do so. We also encourage all parents or carers to create accounts for their children.

This account creation process has been more difficult for a small proportion of customers, for example where they have lost their BRP and have no other form of identity document. We have already made changes to improve the process for these customers, including creating UKVI accounts automatically for newly recognised refugees since 1st November. But we remain concerned that some of the risks of the roll out, particularly to those making the transition from BRPs and legacy documents, were not clearly identified and managed under the previous administration and have been consulting stakeholders on other issues raised by them, along with the wider concern that this change could lead to another Windrush.

For these reasons, we have been working intensively since the summer to understand the challenges being experienced, to listen and respond to the issues raised, and to adjust the roll out plans accordingly.

That is why today I am updating the House on changes we have made to the roll out to address some of the areas of concern, and on how we will continue to engage with stakeholders and communities through the transition.

Legacy document holders

We have streamlined the process for legacy document holders making the transition to eVisas. The updated No Time Limit (NTL) application process was further streamlined in October, building on enhancements delivered to the old version of the form in September, and addressing concerns about the evidential burden placed on applicants. This new form that went live at the end of October also creates a UKVI account as part of the process, removing the need for NTL customers to take the additional step to create their account and access their eVisa. Any customers who continue to have to use the old process because they have no valid ID document will have an account created manually for them by caseworkers. This is a big step forward in smoothing the journey for legacy document holders.

Those holders of legacy documents (such as passports containing ink stamps or a vignette sticker) will still be able to prove their rights as they do today, where their legacy documents currently permit them to do so, including for proving the right to rent or for travel to the UK. It should be noted that stamps in expired passports have not been acceptable to prove right to work since 2014. The position for legacy document holders does not change at the end of the year, but we encourage them to transition to eVisas by making a No Time Limit (NTL) application, to access the significant benefits that eVisas bring to customers. More information on this process is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa>.

Working with carriers

The Home Office has developed technology to enable carriers to check immigration status automatically via systems checks. Over the course of the last 3 years, the Home Office has engaged extensively with carriers about the roll out of ETA and eVisas to travel, to ensure they are fully prepared for the coming changes. This engagement has included direct communications with carriers on an individual basis, regular carrier forums and direct training sessions for carrier staff. As we get closer to the end of the year, we have enhanced our engagement with airlines to ensure their understanding of eVisas and automated checking of status. We are training staff across the world on the options available to them to check immigration permissions, including use of direct digital checks, the online View and Prove service and the 24/7 carrier support hub which they can contact to confirm a passenger's immigration status where necessary.

We are committed to delivering an approach which enables people to demonstrate their status and access the services in the simplest and most secure way possible. We will continue engaging extensively with our stakeholders to ensure that there is a strong understanding of all changes to our border and legal migration system, and a clear messaging campaign to spread public awareness about our move to eVisas.

Extending use of expiring BRPs

While we encourage all BRP holders to switch to using their eVisa via their UKVI account before their BRP expires, if a customer has not created a UKVI account by 1 January 2025 and their BRP has expired, they will be able to do so quickly and easily next year, using their expired BRP if needed.

However, we have also listened to concerns about the risk to customers who are travelling after 31 December, where their underlying status has not expired. In order to smooth the transition to eVisas, we have decided to allow carriers to accept a BRP or EUSS BRC expiring on or after 31 December 2024 as valid evidence of permission to travel until at least 31 March and this date will be kept under review. Customers travelling in the early part of the year are therefore advised to continue carrying their expired BRP, as this will add to the range of checking options already available to carriers.

While this will not affect the way that Border Force conducts its passenger checks, it will provide confidence and reassurance to travellers that they will not face unnecessary delays when proving their travel status with airlines and other carriers, and it reflects our strong desire to act on the concerns that have been raised with us and ensure a smooth transition with minimal disruption for travellers at a busy time of the year.

Increasing support for vulnerable people

We have a number of support services in place to help vulnerable customers to transition to eVisas. There are several national grant funded bodies and community-based organisations spread across the UK ready to offer immediate, free and specialist support for vulnerable individuals in their transition to an eVisa throughout the rest of 2024, and beyond. Further information about the four national grant funded organisations and the support that they can provide is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evisa-community-support-for-vulnerable-people>.

Customers can contact the Resolution Centre, which provides support via email and webchat to those creating their UKVI account, and telephone support to those using the online immigration status services. Individuals can also nominate a 'helper' and give them limited access to their account, so that they can assist with creating a UKVI account, with completing details to access an eVisa, and with submitting any immigration application. Where a person is unable to manage their own affairs due to, for example, age or disability, a 'proxy', who is authorised, can create and manage the account on behalf of the person.

We recognise that some customers may need further assistance with IT-related aspects of creating a UKVI account. Assisted Digital (in-country only) is a free service provided by UKVI to support digitally excluded customers in creating a UKVI account. More information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/assisted-digital-help-online-applications>.

Printed documents

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

We have been recording immigration status information digitally since the turn of the century, and if someone encounters an issue with their eVisa we can search those records to find their information and confirm their status. BRP holders are also able to retain their expired BRPs for their own records, and legacy document holders who make the switch to an eVisa will also still have their physical documents as evidence of their immigration status.

Customers can continue to use the online Right to Work and Rent services, which have been used by millions of people for over two years to prove their rights. This includes using an expired BRP to access these services, provided the person has valid immigration status.

Technical issues

We have designed our digital services to be highly resilient, rigorously tested, and deployed across multiple data centres. Services are proactively monitored for failures, which will highlight any potential problems to allow support teams to resolve them as quickly as possible where they occur. We recognise a small number of customers have experienced issues with their eVisas, which we are working hard to address. This includes a customer's status not being visible or showing incorrectly.

We encourage any users experiencing issues to contact the Home Office to enable these to be investigated and resolved. Where necessary, the Resolution Centre can enable individuals' status to be verified through alternative means. Customers can contact the Resolution Centre using an online webchat service or by phone.

Windrush

We are conscious of the lessons learnt from Wendy Williams extensive review into the Windrush scandal. This government is committed to ensuring that all customers, including the most vulnerable, are properly supported as we transform our immigration system. We understand that individuals may have concerns about proving their status in the absence of a physical document.

Many Windrush individuals had an immigration status that was automatically conferred on them by an Act of Parliament, so in some cases they had no physical proof. The transition to eVisas is in part designed to address that situation by ensuring that everyone with a right to stay in the UK has an eVisa which provides secure and permanent evidence of their status, as well as giving them access to online services which enable them to share evidence of their immigration status with third parties, such as an employer or a landlord.

We hope that these announcements demonstrate how seriously this Government takes the need to ensure that everyone has a smooth transition to eVisas, and that any potential problems are anticipated in advance as far as we are able, or dealt with as quickly and smoothly as possible where not. Above all, we recognise the concerns that people have raised with us, and the issues that have needed to be resolved, and we are both taking action to address them, and committing to maintain an ongoing dialogue with all customers and stakeholders to continue that process in the weeks to come.

A copy of the eVisa partner pack will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRANSPORT

■ Railway Passenger Services

Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander):

[\[HCWS281\]](#)

The Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill received Royal Assent on 28th November 2024, putting on the statute books this important piece of legislation – one of the first Government Bills to be enacted in this Parliament. The Act enables the Government to deliver its manifesto commitment to bring passenger services into public ownership as a first step towards wider rail reform.

Following Royal Assent being granted, I am today launching the programme to transition passenger rail services currently operated by privately-owned operators into public ownership and confirming that services currently operated by South Western Railway and c2c will be the first to transfer into public ownership when their National Rail Contracts expire on 25th May 2025 and 20th July 2025 respectively. The Government is also announcing that, in line with our approach of transferring services as existing contracts expire, Greater Anglia's services will be next to transfer in autumn 2025. The Government will issue an expiry notice to Greater Anglia in due course to confirm the exact transfer date.

I am determined that these will be smooth transitions for passengers and staff. Passengers who use South Western Railway, c2c and Greater Anglia's services can be reassured that trains will continue to run as normal, tickets can be purchased and used in the same way. Tickets bought before the transfer date for travel after that date will continue to be valid.

Safety will be a priority throughout the programme of transitioning passenger services into public ownership and the Department for Transport will work closely with the Office of Rail and Road, the independent regulator for the railways, in this regard. As with any transition, and in line with normal industry practices, appropriate licences, safety certificates and system must be in place before services transfer.

I recognise and value the dedication and expertise of our rail workforce, and the Government will wish to retain the committed and talented staff that keep the railways running for passengers. We will work closely with each operator to ensure that further information is shared directly with staff and trade unions at the appropriate time. The

TUPE Regulations will apply in the same way as they have done in previous transfers, protecting employees' contractual terms and conditions as they transfer.

Following Greater Anglia, the programme will continue with the transfer of one operator's services roughly every three months. We expect these to follow the order in which operators' current contractual minimum terms expire, unless a TOC defaults on its contract to the extent that there is a contractual right to terminate (in which case it will transfer as soon as reasonably practicable) or other extenuating circumstances arise.

I will be monitoring very closely the performance of all existing train operators who run services under contract to the Department and, as the Government have made clear during the passage of the Bill, we will not hesitate to take decisive action where an operator's poor performance means that contractual conditions for early termination of a National Rail Contract are met.

The changes made by the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024 make appointing a publicly owned operator the default rather than a last resort. Therefore, I am also announcing that, from today, the organisation responsible for managing the Public Sector Operators will be changing its name to DfT Operator Ltd. I look forward to working collaboratively with them as these transfers into public ownership begin and as the work of Shadow GBR continues.

Improving our railways will take time, but this is a crucial first step towards fundamental rail reform. Challenges remain on a system that is fragmented, complicated and provides little accountability. In the coming months we will set out more detail about how, through the establishment of Great British Rail, we will reform our railways to modernise working practices, make tickets simpler and fairer, deliver a better service for passengers and a better deal for taxpayers.