



This report shows written answers and statements provided on 11 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:26 P.M., 11 December 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

CONTENTS

ANSWERS	6		
ATTORNEY GENERAL	6	■ Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme	12
■ Demonstrations: Prosecutions	6	■ Prize Money: Research	13
BUSINESS AND TRADE	7	■ Youth Work: Rural Areas	13
■ Business Premises: Rents	7	DEFENCE	13
■ Department for Business and Trade: Furniture	7	■ Armed Forces: Recruitment	13
■ Fireworks: Makerfield	8	■ Armed Forces: Uniforms	14
■ Trade Agreements: Switzerland	8	■ Army: Vehicles	14
CABINET OFFICE	8	■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Armed Forces	14
■ Civil Servants: Recruitment	8	■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty	15
■ Cybersecurity: Investment	9	■ Clyde Naval Base	15
■ Freedom of Information	9	■ Clyde Naval Base and RNAD Cullport	16
■ King Charles III: Art Works	9	■ Defence Equipment: Deployment	16
■ Media: Meetings	10	■ Defence: Innovation	17
■ Ministers: Convictions	10	■ Defence: Procurement	17
■ Ministers: Pay	11	■ Diego Garcia: Military Bases	17
■ Parliamentary Scrutiny	11	■ EU Defence Policy	18
■ Prime Minister: Public Appointments	11	■ Israel and Ukraine: Defence	19
■ Public Sector: Procurement	11	■ Israel: Defence	19
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	12	■ Lasers: Weapons	19
■ 10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection	12	■ LE TacCIS Programme	21

■ Ministry of Defence Guard Service: Northern Ireland	22	■ Imports: China	39
■ Ministry of Defence: Artificial Intelligence	22	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	39
■ Multi-role Ocean Surveillance Ships	22	■ Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018	39
■ RFA Wave Knight and RFA Wave Ruler	23	■ Bluetongue Disease	39
■ South Atlantic Medal Association	23	■ Cats and Dogs: Smuggling	40
■ Ukraine: Defence	23	■ Dangerous Dogs	40
■ Unidentified Flying Objects	24	■ Dogs: Smuggling	40
■ Veterans: Northern Ireland	24	■ Flood Control: Finance	41
■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure	25	■ Flood Control: Huntingdon	41
EDUCATION	26	■ Food: Cybersecurity	42
■ Academies: Buildings	26	■ Housing: Rural Areas	42
■ Care Homes: Profits	27	■ Pets: Animal Welfare	42
■ Care Leavers	28	■ Recycling	43
■ Childcare and Pre-school Education: Admissions	28	■ Sewage: Cornwall	43
■ Children's Rights: Homelessness	30	■ Sewage: Waste Disposal	44
■ Curriculum: Teaching Methods	31	FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE	44
■ Free School Meals: Eligibility	32	■ China: Sanctions	44
■ Pupils: Attendance	33	■ Diplomatic Immunity	45
■ Schools: Attendance	33	■ Herzi Halevi	45
■ Schools: Cornwall	34	■ Human Rights: Xinjiang	45
■ Special Educational Needs	35	■ International Development Association: Finance	46
■ Special Educational Needs: Finance	36	■ Laboratory for AI Security Research	46
■ Special Educational Needs: Training	37	■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid	48
■ Truancy: Fines	37	■ Tsai Ing-wen	49
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	38	■ UN Security Council: Public Appointments	49
■ Energy: Prices	38	■ Zimbabwe: Elections	50
		HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	50
		■ Alcoholism and Drugs: Death	50

■ Alcoholism and Drugs: Rehabilitation	51	■ Ketamine	66
■ Autoimmune Diseases: Health Education and Research	52	■ Manston Asylum Processing Centre: Biometrics	66
■ Bowel Cancer: Screening	53	■ Money Laundering: Cryptocurrencies	66
■ Cancer: Databases	53	■ National Crime Agency: Pay	67
■ Cancer: Rehabilitation	54	■ Police and Crime Commissioners	67
■ Coronavirus: Disease Control	54	■ Police Custody	68
■ Coronavirus: Vaccination	55	■ Police: Anguilla	69
■ Dental Services: Ealing Central and Acton	56	■ Police: Lincolnshire	69
■ Department of Health and Social Care: Staff	56	■ Radicalism	70
■ Futibatinib	56	■ Terrorism: Surveillance	70
■ Health: Children	57	■ Undocumented Migrants	70
■ Heart Diseases: Young People	57	■ Undocumented Migrants: Hotels	71
■ HIV Infection: Diagnosis	58	■ Undocumented Migrants: Housing	71
■ HIV Infection: Health Services	58	■ Undocumented Migrants: Public Opinion	71
■ HIV Infection: Screening	59	■ Undocumented Migrants: Temporary Accommodation	72
■ IVF: Payments	59	■ Visas: Overseas Visitors	72
■ Medicine: Training	60	■ Visas: Refugees	72
■ Mpox: Disease Control	60	■ Visas: Sponsorship	73
■ Northwick Park Hospital: Domestic Visits	61	HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	73
■ Tobacco: Sales	61	■ Affordable Housing: Construction	73
■ Vaccination: Waste Disposal	62	■ Agriculture: Land	73
HOME OFFICE	63	■ Combined Authorities: Accountability	74
■ Care Workers: Migrant Workers	63	■ Construction: Regulation	74
■ Devon and Cornwall Police: Public Appointments	64	■ Devolution: Cornwall	75
■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes	64	■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes	75
■ Immigration Controls: Airports	65		
■ Immigration Controls: Biometrics	65		

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation	76	■ Prison Accommodation	85
■ Homelessness: Temporary Accommodation	76	■ Social Workers: Powers of Entry	85
■ Housing: Ownership	77	LEADER OF THE HOUSE	85
■ Housing: Private Sector	77	■ Environment Protection	85
■ Housing: Watchet	77	NORTHERN IRELAND	85
■ Land: Valuation	78	■ Consumer Goods: Safety	85
■ Local Government Finance	78	SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY	86
■ Local Government Finance: Bedfordshire	79	■ Broadband and Mobile Phones: Standards	86
■ Local Government Services: Rural Areas	79	■ Food: Disease Control	87
■ Local Government: Employers' Contributions	79	■ Food: Research	87
■ Local Government: Remote Working	80	■ Research: Investment	87
■ Local Plans	80	TRANSPORT	88
■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	81	■ Blue Badge Scheme: Children	88
■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Secondment	81	■ Bus Services	88
■ Parking: Regulation	81	■ Bus Services: Lincolnshire	88
■ Planning	81	■ Dangerous Driving: Fines	89
■ Planning: Appeals	82	■ Great Western Railway: Standards	89
■ Planning: Derelict Land	82	TREASURY	89
■ Planning: Reform	82	■ Dental Services: Employers' Contributions	89
■ Rehabilitation and Victim Support Schemes: Torbay	83	■ Digital Assets: Foreign Investment in UK	90
■ Storms: Chippenham	84	■ Digital Assets: Regulation	91
■ Supported Housing: Advisory Services	84	■ Disability: Taxation	91
JUSTICE	84	■ Hospitality Industry and Leisure: Business Rates	91
■ Domestic Violence: Older People	84	■ Ministers: Official Cars	92
		■ Personal Care Services: Regulation	92
		WALES	93
		■ Council Tax: Wales	93

■ Public Expenditure: Wales	93	WRITTEN STATEMENTS	96
■ Senedd Cymru	93	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND	
WORK AND PENSIONS	94	RURAL AFFAIRS	96
■ Connect to Work and Universal Support	94	■ UK Food Security Report 2024	96
■ Department for Work and Pensions: Training	94	■ Conclusion of annual negotiations for 2025 fishing opportunities	96
■ Employment Schemes: Finance	94	■ Farming Schemes	98
■ Jobcentres and Universal Credit: Telephone Services	95	JUSTICE	100
■ Pension Credit	95	■ 10-year Prison Capacity Strategy and Annual Statement	100
		NORTHERN IRELAND	101
		■ Outcome of the consent process under Schedule 6A Northern Ireland Act 1998	101

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

■ Demonstrations: Prosecutions

Josh Babarinde:[\[17639\]](#)

To ask the Solicitor General, how many prosecutions for protest-related offences the Crown Prosecution Service has completed under (a) section (i) 12 and (ii) 14 of the Public Order Act 1986, as amended by section 75 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, (b) each of sections 78 to 80 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and (c) (i) each of sections 1 to 7, (ii) section 9 and (iii) section 27 of the Public Order Act 2023; of those prosecutions, how many and what proportion resulted in (1) a conviction, (2) imprisonment and (3) a financial penalty; and what the average (x) prison sentence and (y) financial penalty was in such cases.

Lucy Rigby:

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) holds data on the number of prosecutions where a charge has been authorised and reached a first hearing in the magistrates' courts for specific offences.

It is important to note that CPS offences data is only extracted into the Case Management Information System once the prosecution case has been finalised, this means that the following offence data only relates to completed prosecutions and not any ongoing prosecutions.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSCA) came into effect in April 2022, amending sections 12 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986.

The below table provides details of the number of offences charged under these amended sections as well as offences under section 78 PCSCA and section 137 of the Highways Act 1980 (as amended by section 80 PCSCA). To date, there have been no offences charged under section 14ZA(10) of the Public Order Act 1986 (inserted by section 79 PCSCA), where the proceedings have been completed.

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025 Q1
s12 Public Order Act 1986	3	163	1
s14 Public Order Act 1986	59	35	26
s78 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022	52	209	48
s137 Highways Act 1980	706	806	162

Data Source: CPS Case Management Information System

The Public Order Act 2023 came into effect in May 2023. The table below provides details of the number of offences charged under sections 1, 2, and 7 of the Act. To date, there have been no offences charged under sections 3 to 6, 9 or 27 of the Act where the proceedings have been completed.

	2023-2024	2024-2025 Q1
s1 Public Order Act 2023	16	13
s2 Public Order Act 2023	4	5
s7 Public Order Act 2023	6	0

Data Source: CPS Case Management Information System

The CPS does not hold data in relation to the outcome of specific offences. Therefore, I am unable to provide an answer to those parts of your question that relate to the proportion of prosecutions for these offences that resulted a conviction, imprisonment and/or financial penalty.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Business Premises: Rents

Jeremy Corbyn:

[\[18103\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will take steps to ensure that the Insolvency Service investigates landlords that do not follow tribunal rent rulings to pay back monies owed.

Justin Madders:

If a landlord fails to pay a rent repayment order, the order may be enforced by creditors using civil recovery action, such as pursuing a County Court judgment or ultimately petitioning for a winding-up order against the company. Should a winding-up order be made against the company, this would trigger an investigation by the Official Receiver into how the company's affairs have been conducted and to establish the cause of its insolvency.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Furniture

Andrew Griffith:

[\[18417\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many (a) desks and (b) chairs have been procured for use by his Department since 5 July 2024.

Justin Madders:

According to central records, 16 chairs and 10 desks have been procured since 5 July 2024. These have been provided to colleagues as reasonable adjustments and are in use in homes and offices.

■ **Fireworks: Makerfield****Josh Simons:**[\[18239\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to reduce firework misuse in Makerfield constituency.

Justin Madders:

Enforcement powers exist for local authorities to take action when fireworks are unsafe, sold illegally or misused. Local authorities and the police also have powers to tackle anti-social behaviour caused by the misuse of fireworks. It is for local areas to decide how best to deploy these powers, based on their specific circumstances.

To inform any future decisions on the regulation of fireworks I intend to engage with businesses, consumer groups and charities to gather evidence on the issues with and impacts of fireworks.

■ **Trade Agreements: Switzerland****Ruth Jones:**[\[18393\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what progress his Department has made on including an ambitious intellectual property protection framework in the UK-Swiss free trade deal.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The fifth round of negotiations on an enhanced free trade agreement with Switzerland took place in London in October 2024. As part of that, negotiations on intellectual property continued to advance across a number of rights areas. The UK aims to agree a comprehensive IP chapter which builds on the UK and Switzerland's existing high mutual standards, balances interests across all UK industries and sectors, and reaches an outcome that delivers for the whole of the UK.

CABINET OFFICE■ **Civil Servants: Recruitment****John Glen:**[\[6093\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, What guidance his Department issues on ministerial (a) authorisation and (b) approval of a decision to appoint a civil servant under one of the Recruitment Principles exceptions.

Georgia Gould:

Ministerial approval is not required to appoint a civil servant using an exception to the [Recruitment Principles](#).

■ Cybersecurity: Investment

David Reed:

[R] [17733]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how will industry investment play a role in the development of autonomous offensive and defensive cyber tooling for the purpose of (a) national security and (b) defence.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Investing in cyber security is critical to all sectors of the UK economy, enabling long-term, secure and resilient growth. The UK is an attractive destination for cyber investors, owing to its collaborative environment, access to talent and skills, world-class research, and support to innovation. The Government partners closely with industry to secure the UK in cyberspace.

In particular, the National Cyber Force delivers the UK's national cyber effects capability. It works in partnership with industry and academia to achieve this, for example through the Lancashire Cyber Partnership, a strategic collaboration to facilitate and boost cyber-led economic growth across digital industries, technology supply chains, and broader disciplines. This is just one regional example of many where we encourage investment in the UK's cyber sector.

The National Cyber Security Centre is also working with industry to better understand and mitigate the risks from increased use of Artificial Intelligence by cyber threat actors, including those targeting national security and defence.

■ Freedom of Information

Mr Richard Holden:

[18402]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's guidance entitled Freedom of Information - FOI Clearing House Review, updated on 14 December 2023, if he will make it his policy to produce a regular digest of Round Robin lists.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Details of the FOI Round Robin process are published on GOV.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cabinet-office-and-freedom-of-information>.

As with the previous administration, this Government will continue to look into the possibility of producing a regular digest of Round Robin lists.

■ King Charles III: Art Works

Mr Richard Holden:

[18219]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Conclusion of His Majesty The King's free Portrait Scheme, published on 28 November 2024, if he will list each (a) UK, (b) Welsh and (c) Scottish Government public body which was eligible for but did not order a free portrait.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18220\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the press release entitled Conclusion of His Majesty the King's free portrait scheme, published on 28 November 2024, which local authorities did not request a portrait, excluding town and parish councils.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

Public authorities throughout the United Kingdom were given an opportunity to apply for a free portrait of His Majesty The King if they wanted to display it in their building. This was a voluntary scheme to mark the accession of His Majesty The King. The announcement was originally made on 1 April 2023 and the scheme was launched in November that year and closed for applications in August 2024.

As it was a voluntary scheme, there was no obligation for public authorities to apply for a portrait. It would therefore be inappropriate to disclose the list of individual authorities and institutions which did not order a free portrait.

■ **Media: Meetings**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18399\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to his Department's transparency data on meetings with senior media figures, whether (a) Meta, (b) X and (c) other social media organisations are classed as media.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Guidance on ministers', special advisers', and senior officials' transparency returns is published on GOV.UK and includes details of who would be considered senior media figures for these purposes.

■ **Ministers: Convictions**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18204\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what information the Government holds on how many Ministers have criminal convictions.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18213\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Government has a policy on appointing Ministers of the Crown with (a) spent and (b) unspent criminal convictions.

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18218\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether Ministers are required to declare (a) spent and (b) unspent criminal convictions when they are formally appointed.

Georgia Gould:

There is an established process in place for the appointment of ministers.

Expectations of the standards of conduct expected of all government ministers are set out in the Ministerial Code.

■ Ministers: Pay

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18403\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Answer of 19 November 2024 to Question HL2359 on Ministers: Pay, which Minister is paid by the Labour Party; and whether they receive a Ministerial pension contribution.

Georgia Gould:

The Member for Lewisham West and East Dulwich is paid by the Labour Party for her position as party chair. She also serves as the Minister without Portfolio in the Cabinet Office. She does not receive a salary under the provisions of the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975, and therefore is not entitled to receive a ministerial pension contribution.

■ Parliamentary Scrutiny

Mark Pritchard:

[\[17778\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what processes his Department has in place for Parliamentary oversight of Government decisions in (a) a time of war and (b) circumstances where the House of Commons is not functional.

Nick Thomas-Symonds:

It is a long-standing convention that the Government notifies the House of Commons of significant military action, either before or after the event, and where appropriate, makes time for a debate on that action. In the event that the House of Commons is unable to meet or conduct its business, the Government is committed to restoring the functioning of democratic institutions at the earliest opportunity. Even in emergency scenarios it is vital that Government decisions are scrutinised appropriately.

■ Prime Minister: Public Appointments

Mike Wood:

[\[17545\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for which public appointments the Prime Minister is directly responsible.

Georgia Gould:

The Prime Minister is directly responsible for public appointments to 61 bodies and offices across government departments. Individual appointments made by the Prime Minister are publicly announced at the time of appointment.

■ Public Sector: Procurement

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16510\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 7 October 2024 to Question 5121 on Employment, whether he has made an estimate of the potential cost to public authorities of the Government's procurement reforms on (a) new social value requirements and (b) trade union recognition and access requirements.

Georgia Gould:

The Employment Rights Bill was published in October along with a full Impact Assessment. The government will also publish a new National Procurement Policy Statement that will set how we will ensure that public procurement supports the Government's missions, drives value for money and delivers social value.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT■ **10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection****Mr Richard Holden:**[\[18400\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 25 November 2024 to Question 15230 on 10 Downing Street: Government Art Collection, whether the Government Art Collection website shows what artworks have been removed from 10 Downing Street since 5 July 2024.

Chris Bryant:

The Government Art Collection website has all artworks belonging to the Collection and their current location. You can also search for all artworks in a specific location.

The website does not have lists of works removed from a location.

■ **Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme****Andrew Rosindell:**[\[17517\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she has taken to support listed places of worship.

Andrew Rosindell:[\[17518\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support the Church of England in maintaining its built heritage.

Chris Bryant:

There is a range of funding available via DCMS and the Department's Arm's-Length Bodies that supports listed places of worship, including Church of England buildings. These include the 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 (CCT), which funds repairs and maintenance of over 350 churches in the CCT portfolio; and Historic England's Heritage At Risk grants, which will be funding £9 million worth of repairs to buildings on Historic England's Heritage at Risk register between April 2024 and March 2025.

■ Prize Money: Research

Wendy Morton:

[\[17538\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to publish research commissioned by her department to gather evidence about the (a) size and (b) nature of the prize draw sector.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Department is still considering the findings of the independent research, which looked at the size and nature of the prize draw market, as well as possible gambling harm associated with these products. This research is informing our policy considerations, as whilst not regulated as a gambling product under the Gambling Act, we want people who participate in large scale commercial prize draws to be confident that proportionate protections are in place. We will update Parliament further in due course.

■ Youth Work: Rural Areas

Stuart Anderson:

[\[17878\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to help increase the availability of detached youth work in rural communities.

Stephanie Peacock:

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

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

The Strategy will be published next year.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces: Recruitment

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[17776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what performance reviews have been conducted on Capita's role in the recruitment of military personnel in the last five years.

Luke Pollard:

The Army reviews Capita's performance through multiple routine 'holding-to-account' forums and reports, as set out in the Recruitment Partnering Programme contract. This includes monthly measurement against key performance indicators. Additional

performance audit reviews, directed by the previous Secretary of State, were conducted in May/June 2021 and July/August 2023.

■ **Armed Forces: Uniforms**

Gregory Stafford: [\[18328\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of sourcing military uniforms from China.

Maria Eagle:

Tenders to supply items of military clothing are conducted in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which ensure best value for the taxpayer in the delivery of Defence requirements. Through the Logistics Commodities and Services Transformation contract with Leidos Europe Limited, Defence Equipment & Support procures approximately 16,000 different clothing items, plus a further 1,300 supporting ceremonial accoutrements such as cuirasses and sabres that form a part of ceremonial uniforms. Uniforms are not purchased fully assembled but rather as individual items.

■ **Army: Vehicles**

James Cartlidge: [\[18154\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an estimate of the total number of heavy equipment transporters in service within the Army tabulated by those (a) currently available and (b) in maintenance.

James Cartlidge: [\[18156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the capacity of the Army's fleet of heavy equipment transporters.

Maria Eagle:

The Army's Heavy Equipment Transporter (HET) capability is delivered through a service contract with KBR. The contract, which commenced in July 2024, provides the Army with 80 HET trains (consisting of tractor and trailer) and all maintenance activity and Sponsored Reserve personnel to operate them alongside the Regular Army. Under the contract, sufficient HET are maintained at specific readiness levels to enable the Army to conduct its operational and training activity.

We do not routinely disclose information pertaining to the operational readiness of Defence's capabilities, therefore a detailed breakdown has not been provided.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Armed Forces**

Mr Mark Francois: [\[18104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 7499 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, whether (a) assets and (b) staff of the Mauritian armed forces will be (i) proximately and (ii) co-located with (A) UK and (B) US personnel.

Luke Pollard:

Our primary goal throughout negotiations was to protect the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, which plays a crucial role in regional and international security.

The operation of the base will continue unchanged with strong protections from malign influence. For the first time in over 50 years the base will be undisputed and legally secure.

Details of the Treaty agreed between the UK and Mauritius will come before Parliament for scrutiny in the usual manner following its signature. It would be inappropriate to release further details at this stage.

■ British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[18106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 7499 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, whether the Mauritian government will have the right to allow (a) basing on, (b) occupancy of and (c) access to other BIOT islands by other (i) countries and (ii) organisations.

Luke Pollard:

Our primary goal throughout negotiations was to protect the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, which plays a crucial role in regional and international security. The operation of the base will continue unchanged with strong protections from malign influence. For the first time in over 50 years the base will be undisputed and legally secure.

Details of the Treaty agreed between the UK and Mauritius will come before Parliament for scrutiny in the usual manner following its signature. We have full Mauritian backing for robust security arrangements, including preventing foreign armed forces from accessing or establishing themselves on the outer islands. It would be inappropriate to release further details at this stage.

■ Clyde Naval Base**Siân Berry:**[\[17712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the (a) name, (b) purpose, (c) expected in-service date and (d) forecasted cost to the public purse is for all infrastructure projects within the Clyde Infrastructure programme.

Maria Eagle:

As part of the Government's Major Project Portfolio, details on the Clyde Infrastructure programme are routinely released as part of this Government's annual transparency return to Parliament.

■ Clyde Naval Base and RNAD Coulport**Siân Berry:** [\[17711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether there are any planned infrastructure projects at (a) HMNB Clyde and (b) RNAD Coulport that do not fall within the Clyde Infrastructure Programme.

Maria Eagle:

Several infrastructure projects at His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde do not fall within the Clyde Infrastructure Programme, for instance routine base maintenance and Programme EUSTON, the delivery of resilient out of water engineering capability.

Siân Berry: [\[17713\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the operating costs were for (a) HMNB Clyde and (b) RNAD Coulport for the most recent financial year.

Maria Eagle:

I am unable to release this information due to operational sensitivities.

■ Defence Equipment: Deployment**James Cartlidge:** [\[17184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, where and when (a) Watchkeeper Mk 1, (b) Puma, (c) the 14 Chinook helicopters that are being retired, (d) HMS Northumberland, (e) HMS Albion, (f) HMS Bulwark, (g) RFA Wave Knight and (h) RFA Wave Ruler were last used on operations.

Luke Pollard:

Defence has taken the decision to retire some ageing equipment, as we transition to new capabilities and make our Armed Forces fit for the future.

HMS BULWARK was last operation in 2017; HMS NORTHUMBERLAND in 2022; HMS ALBION in 2023; RFA WAVE RULER in 2017; and RFA WAVE KNIGHT in 2022. A Watchkeeper Mk1 battery deployed Estonia in August 2024 as part of Exercise ATHENA SHIELD. Puma HC2 is deployed now in Cyprus and Brunei and will continue to provide operational support until retirement on 31 Mar 25. The 14 Chinooks being retired continue to provide operational output as part of the forward fleet – the available fleet available for operations. They will remain in service until their flying hours reach the next deep maintenance requirement period. Defence is considering a range of options to replace these platforms – this includes the commitment to numerous next generation capabilities such as Type 26 and 31 Frigates, and the Extended Range version of the Chinook helicopter.

■ Defence: Innovation

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[18116\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many (a) mentors and (b) experts support projects backed through the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic European Regional Office; and at what cost.

Maria Eagle:

The UK is committed to supporting the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) programme to find and accelerate dual-use innovation capacity across the Alliance.

Mentors and experts are engaged by HQ DIANA and not the Ministry of Defence (MOD). As the MOD was not directly involved in delivering the first cohort of the programme in 2024 we do not hold information on the numbers of mentors and assessors used. The MOD is taking part in the second cohort of the programme which has only just started and mentors and experts are yet to be assigned.

■ Defence: Procurement

Sir John Hayes:

[\[17763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will take steps to prioritise domestic supply chains in defence procurement.

Maria Eagle:

This Government is committed to developing a UK Defence industrial base that ensures a strong Defence sector and resilient supply chains. The Statement of Intent for the Defence Industrial Strategy, published on Monday 2 December, set out a commitment to prioritising UK businesses for investment and boosting sovereign capacity. It will enact a deep reform of Ministry of Defence procurement to reduce waste, improve delivery and support growth, whilst ensuring we remain compliant with our obligations under our international trade agreements.

■ Diego Garcia: Military Bases

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[18105\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, Pursuant to the Answer of 10 October 2024 to Question 7499 on British Indian Ocean Territory: Sovereignty, what right of (a) access, (b) inspection and (c) veto the Mauritian Government will have to the Chagos base.

Luke Pollard:

Our primary goal throughout negotiations was to protect the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia, which plays a crucial role in regional and international security.

The operation of the base will continue unchanged with strong protections from malign influence. For the first time in over 50 years the base will be undisputed and legally secure.

Details of the Treaty agreed between the UK and Mauritius will come before Parliament for scrutiny in the usual manner following its signature. It would be inappropriate to release further details at this stage.

■ EU Defence Policy

Mr Mark Francois: [\[18111\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department is holding discussions with (a) European and (b) EU counterparts on changes to binding PESCO commitments.

Maria Eagle:

We continue to monitor how PESCO rules work in practice, in particular the extent to which they allow meaningful participation of non-EU NATO Allies. We will continue to encourage the EU and EU Member States to ensure that PESCO activity is complementary to NATO and supportive of meaningful third country participation in individual PESCO projects.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[18114\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his policy is on engagement with the (a) EU Single Intelligence and Analysis Capacity, (b) projected EU Rapid Deployment Capacity and (c) planned EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability.

Luke Pollard:

We want a new geopolitical partnership with the EU that drives closer coordination and that complements our unshakable commitment to NATO, which will remain the foremost vehicle for European security. We want this new partnership to formalise our exchanges on a full range of Foreign policy and security issues, enhancing how we work together on international crisis response, strengthening joint work on multilateral and global issues, and building our defence relationship including consultations on respective defence initiatives and defence industry matters.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[18115\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his policy is on legacy UK obligations arising from the triggering by an EU country of Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union.

Luke Pollard:

Since leaving the EU, there are no legacy UK obligations to respond to a trigger of Article 42 (7). NATO is the cornerstone of European defence. NATO Article 5 is the ultimate guarantor of all Allies' ability to live freely and build a secure, more prosperous future for their people. An armed attack against one Ally is considered an attack against all. This principle binds NATO's members together in a spirit of solidarity, committing them to protect each other. Our commitment to Article 5 is real, strong, and unbreakable.

■ Israel and Ukraine: Defence

David Reed:

[R] [\[17723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how collaboration with (a) Ukrainian and (b) Israeli (i) hardware and (ii) software technology companies in the defence sector is informing the Strategic Defence Review.

Luke Pollard:

The Strategic Defence Review is considering all aspects of Defence, involving, and receiving inputs from other Government Departments, industry and allies and partners. Throughout this process we have collaborated with a range of international counterparts to understand how UK Defence can best take advantage of the pace of commercial technological developments.

■ Israel: Defence

David Reed:

[R] [\[17722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to collaborate with Israeli (a) hardware and (b) software technology companies in the defence sector; and what lessons he has learned from that collaboration..

Luke Pollard:

The UK collaborates with a range of international partners, including Israel, to develop cutting-edge capabilities to assure the British Armed Forces' continued strategic advantage. Ministry of Defence officials engage regularly with their international counterparts to further the UK's interests at home and overseas, and we learn continually from our overseas partners.

■ Lasers: Weapons

James Cartlidge:

[\[18147\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to undertake a full procurement of Radio Frequency Directed Energy Weapon capability.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to the continued investment in UK Sovereign Radio Frequency Directed Energy Weapons (RFDEW) technology, to provide cutting edge capability to the Armed Forces at pace.

The advanced technology is being developed by a joint team from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) and Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S), working with UK industry. RFDEW is undergoing extensive field testing with British soldiers where early user engagement is a key element in understanding and forming how this technology will be used by the war fighter. As announced in May 2024, the MOD is exploring options to exploit the existing UK developed RFDEW project as a C-UAS Minimum Deployable Capability. A rapid procurement approach and agile working with industry and across MOD will ensure that this capability is developed at pace.

James Cartlidge:

[\[18148\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of (a) radio frequency directed energy weapons, (b) DragonFire lasers and (c) other directed energy weapons for the protection of (i) UK and (ii) United States Visiting Forces military bases on the UK mainland.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has committed to accelerating the continued investment in UK Sovereign Directed Energy Weapon (DEW) technology to provide cutting edge capability to the Armed Forces swiftly. DEW technology mitigates against the increasing threat from direct attack or weapon drop drones by defeating them or discouraging attempts by significantly reducing their probability of success. The UK has trialled these systems, has access to data on other non-UK systems, and throughout their development we will ensure they're designed to counter the threats faced by our Armed Forces. This will allow our Armed Forces to operate more effectively against a changing and asymmetric threat landscape, demonstrating the MOD's approach to transitioning technology into capability meeting real world threats.

Due to operational security, the MOD does not comment on the specific protection of military bases.

James Cartlidge:

[\[18160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate his Department has made of the cost of procuring the radio frequency directed energy weapon capability.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to the continued investment in UK Sovereign Radio Frequency Directed Energy Weapons (RFDEW) technology, to provide cutting edge capability to the Armed Forces at pace. The MOD has committed £184 million to Direct Energy Weapon technology over the next three years in order to deliver capability in the early 2030's. Advancing investment in British Industry will develop state-of-the-art capability for the UK Armed Forces, and as the MOD announced in May 2024, we are exploring options to exploit the existing UK developed RFDEW project as a C-UAS Minimum Deployable Capability at increased pace. On specific costs we have done analysis but accurate figures will not be known until designs are finalised, something we continue to work on.

James Cartlidge:

[\[18161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has had recent discussions with his international allies on the potential export of radio frequency directed energy weapons.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to the continued investment in UK Sovereign Directed Energy Weapons (DEW) technology, to provide cutting edge capability to the Armed Forces at pace. The advanced technology is being developed

by a joint team from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) and Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S), working with UK industry.

We have explored the export potential for DEW, which is another driver for our pace in developing this technology, and we continue to talk to international partners about opportunities for collaboration and export. We will continue to stimulate UK industry through delivering a capability that prioritises a UK sovereign approach, with a focus on building the UK Directed Energy Weapons supply chain and required suitably qualified and experienced person that can help us to take advantage of this export opportunity.

James Cartlidge:

[\[18162\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress his Department has made on extending the range of radio frequency directed energy weapons.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has committed to developing and continuing to invest in UK Sovereign Directed Energy Weapon (DEW) technology, to provide cutting edge capability to the Armed Forces at pace. Radio Frequency Directed Energy Weapon are a new game-changing weapon that is under development for the UK's Armed Forces that uses radio waves to disable enemy electronics and take down multiple drones at once.

The advanced technology is being developed by a joint team from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) and Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S), working with UK industry. The MOD has committed to developing Radio Frequency DEW into operational capability to meet real world threats. Thus far, the system has been tested against a range of targets, proving to be highly effective. The system will be able to effect targets up to 1km away, with further development taking place to extending the range.

■ LE TacCIS Programme

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[18118\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16468 on LE TacCIS programme, what the reasons are for the delay in the Morpheus communications project.

Maria Eagle:

The MORPHEUS project is delayed following contract delays in 2021.

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[18119\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16468 on LE TacCIS programme, what the cost is of the Morpheus communications programme as of 5 December 2024.

Maria Eagle:

As of 5 December 2024, total expenditure for the MORPHEUS project is c£828 million.

Mr Mark Francois:[\[18120\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has imposed (a) financial penalties and (b) adjustments to contract terms with General Dynamics in relation to the delay of the MORPHEUS project within the Land Environment Tactical Communication and Information Systems programme.

Maria Eagle:

The MORPHEUS Evolve to Open Transition Partner (EvO TP) contract with General Dynamics Missions Systems (UK) (GDMS(UK)), which was focused on evolving the proprietary Bowman system, was concluded in December 2023. Commercial confidentiality precludes providing the specific details of the arrangements made, however the Department can provide assurance that these arrangements have been verified by both HM Treasury and Cabinet Office as representing the best value for money approach for the taxpayer.

Ministry of Defence Guard Service: Northern Ireland**Alex Easton:**[\[17703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of standing down the Guard Force in Northern Ireland on the security of Army Reserve Centres; and what plans he has to support affected full-time reserve personnel.

Luke Pollard:

The guarding of Army Reserve Centres in Northern Ireland is being reviewed. The Government will share further details with the House in due course.

Ministry of Defence: Artificial Intelligence**David Reed:**[\[R\] \[18320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department's artificial intelligence software is Defence Writing compatible.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is exploring the use of AI in different ways to enhance productivity, efficiency and effectiveness by augmenting the capabilities of our people. The Department's current policy requires that all outputs generated by AI systems are reviewed and adapted by our people for accuracy and to ensure compliance with MOD policies, including the Defence Writing Guide (Joint Services Publication 101).

Multi-role Ocean Surveillance Ships**James Cartlidge:**[\[17150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the status is of the planned multi-role support ships.

Maria Eagle:

The Muti Role Support Ships programme is in the concept phase and aims to deliver the first of class by 2033.

David Reed:[\[17472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of reallocating funds from the decommissioning of HMS (a) Albion and (b) Bulwark to accelerate delivery of Multi-Role Support Ships.

Maria Eagle:

The Multi-Role Support Ship programme is in the Concept Phase. It is funded from the Defence budget to enable the Royal Navy and Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) to conduct detailed preparatory work to deliver first of class by 2033.

RFA Wave Knight and RFA Wave Ruler**David Reed:**[\[17474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the projected annual operational cost savings are from the decommissioning of (a) RFA Wave Knight and (b) RFA Wave Ruler.

Maria Eagle:

The Ministry of Defence currently forecasts a combined total of £4.5 million per annum for the "Base Maintenance" of RFA Wave Ruler and RFA Wave Knight.

South Atlantic Medal Association**Dame Caroline Dinenge:**[\[17525\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to financially support the South Atlantic Medal Association.

Al Carns:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has no plans to provide financial support to the South Atlantic Medal Association 1982 (SAMA'82).

However, veterans who have been awarded the South Atlantic Medal are entitled to concessionary travel to the Falkland Islands via the South Atlantic Airbridge.

Applications for this concession can be made through the SAMA'82 website:

www.sama82.org.uk/flights/. Within the concessionary priorities which govern the allocation of seats, the MOD has allocated SAMA'82 travellers a higher priority than most categories of Regular serving members of the UK Armed Forces and entitled MOD Civil Servants and their families.

Ukraine: Defence**David Reed:**[\[R\] \[17721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he is taking to collaborate with Ukrainian (a) hardware and (b) software technology companies in the defence sector; and what lessons he has learned from that collaboration.

Maria Eagle:

Since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) has collaborated with both Ukrainian hardware and software technology companies in the defence sector.

UK MOD is constantly assessing what lessons can be learned from all partnerships, including how close and agile partnerships can help both Ukraine and UK defence industrial capability and capacity.

Details are not released publicly due to operational security.

Unidentified Flying Objects**David Reed:**[\[18321\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his Department's policy is on reporting Unidentified Aerial Phenomena; and whether new material has been classified on the subject since the UK's declassification programme.

Luke Pollard:

Whilst we are aware of the differing approaches currently being undertaken by other countries and allies in the investigation of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP), the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) position on UAP remains unchanged, which is, that in over 50 years, no sighting reported to the Department has indicated the existence of any military threat to the United Kingdom.

The MOD ceased to investigate reports of UFO or UAP in 2009 and has not classified any new material on the subject since. It has been deemed more valuable to prioritise MOD staff towards other Defence-related activities. For this reason, there are no current plans to create a dedicated team to investigate incidences of alleged sightings. All MOD files relating to UFOs that were created up until 2009 have been released to The National Archives (TNA).

Veterans: Northern Ireland**Alex Easton:**[\[18297\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps he plans to take to support (a) veterans and (b) bereaved service families in Northern Ireland, in the context of the closure of the Veterans' Support Office.

Al Carns:

The Government is committed to ensuring that veterans and the bereaved community, wherever they live in the UK, are able to access timely and appropriate support should they require it. The Government also recognises the unique commitment that Service families make to our country, and in particular the sacrifices of those who are bereaved. That is why we are working to coordinate and cohere the range of support available, including in Northern Ireland, more effectively.

Defence takes a holistic, multi agency approach to supporting our bereaved community, with UK wide support in place through the Single Services and the

Defence Bereaved Families Group. Local support is additionally provided via the Veterans Welfare Service Northern Ireland (VWS NI), which is a specialist statutory welfare provider that supports veterans and their families via its field teams across Northern Ireland. The service provides information and practical support, including physiotherapy and psychological therapies for eligible veterans. In addition, the £500,000 Defence Medical Welfare Service pilot, which supports veterans' health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland, is providing valuable insight to improve our understanding of veterans' health needs locally and works closely with VWS NI. These initiatives build on the work of the 11 Veterans' Champions in councils across Northern Ireland.

The Office for Veterans Affairs' has recently established a presence in Northern Ireland, to support strategic coordination of organisations, programmes and initiatives for veterans' wellbeing. The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, a charity and Non Departmental Public Body of the Ministry of Defence, supports the Thrive Together programme, which is led by the charity Brooke House and aims to establish sustainable and resilient networks to ensure veterans and their families receive prompt, effective and tailored support in Northern Ireland.

The Government is additionally working to ensure the bereaved community are clearly recognised and referenced as a cohort in their own right, distinctly separate to veterans, both internally and externally in communications and language used. This will improve clear signposting to support and resources available, and to ensure recognition of bereaved as a specific cohort no matter where they are living.

■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure

Lee Anderson:

[\[17887\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has met the nuclear test veteran campaign group.

AI Carns:

The Government is deeply grateful to all those who participated in the UK nuclear testing programme. We recognise their Service and the huge contribution they have made to the UK's security.

This is why I have already met with both Parliamentarians and representatives from the nuclear test veteran community to discuss a range of topics relating to their experiences and the challenges they face. These efforts have resulted in us expanding the criteria for the commemorative Nuclear Test Medal. Further engagement is already planned before the end of the year. I have also asked officials to continue to regularly meet with Nuclear Test Veteran groups.

Martin Wrigley:

[\[17938\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will take steps to expedite compensation for nuclear test veterans.

Al Carns:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my noble Friend, the Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard), on 27 November 2024 to Question 15649 to the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts).

Attachments:

1. [Veterans: Radiation Exposure](#) [15649 - Veterans Radiation Exposure.docx]

EDUCATION**■ Academies: Buildings****Steve Darling:****[18241]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance her Department has issued to sixth form academies on securing capital funding for new school buildings when existing buildings are no longer fit for purpose.

Stephen Morgan:

Ensuring schools, including sixth form college academies, have the resources and buildings they need is a key part of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every young person the best start in life.

Responsibility for keeping school and sixth form buildings safe and well-maintained lies with institutions and their responsible bodies. These are typically local authorities, academy trusts, or voluntary aided school bodies. The department supports them by providing capital funding, delivering major rebuilding programmes and offering guidance and support.

The department has allocated £1.8 billion in condition funding for 2024/25 for schools, including sixth form academies, informed by consistent data on the condition of the school estate. As part of the 2025/26 budget, the department is increasing capital allocations to improve the condition of school buildings to £2.1 billion, £300 million more than this year.

The £1.8 billion of funding allocated in 2024/25 includes £1.15 billion in School Condition Allocations (SCA) for local authorities and other large responsible bodies, including large multi-academy trusts, to invest in maintaining and improving the condition of their school buildings, including any sixth form academies. This funding is calculated formulaically, and paid directly to the responsible bodies, without the need to apply. The department provides guidance on how funding is calculated and how it can be spent at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-capital-funding>.

Smaller academy trusts and sixth form colleges are able to apply to the condition improvement fund (CIF), instead of receiving SCA. This is a bid-based fund for projects to address condition issues with buildings, with a focus on keeping them safe and in good working order. Guidance on the CIF can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/condition-improvement-fund>.

The 2025/26 budget also includes £1.4 billion to support the current school rebuilding programme, reaffirming the department's commitment to rebuilding or refurbishing 518 schools and sixth form colleges through the programme. Future capital funding for schools beyond 2025/26 will be confirmed following the next multi-year phase of the spending review.

Any responsible body that has a significant safety issue with one of its buildings that cannot be managed through local resources can contact the department directly for advice and support.

■ Care Homes: Profits

Mike Amesbury:

[\[17602\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will take steps to ensure that private firms do not profit from out of area looked after children's residential care placements.

Janet Daby:

The needs of the child are paramount when deciding the right care placement. Though the department wants to reduce out of area placements, they will always be part of the care landscape. Sometimes circumstances make it the right decision for a child to be placed elsewhere, for example when they are at risk from domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking or gang violence.

Moving a child away is not a decision to be taken lightly and there are legislative safeguards around this. Directors of children's services are required to sign off each such decision and Ofsted can challenge where they believe poor decisions are being made. This is to encourage local authorities to place children locally wherever possible.

The department is clear that profiteering from vulnerable children in care is absolutely unacceptable, irrespective of whether a child is placed in or out of area, and the department is committed to stamping out profiteering where it occurs in the children's social care placement market.

On 18 November 2024, the department published its policy paper 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive', which set out ambitious reforms across children's social care. As part of these, the department is taking forward a package of measures, including through legislation, to rebalance the children's social care placement market. These measures will improve competition, regulation and commissioning of placements and bring greater visibility to the prices local authorities are paying and the profits providers are making. If the department does not see a reduction in profiteering it will not hesitate to take action to cap providers' profits.

■ Care Leavers

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[17749\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the merits of ensuring that the Staying Close programme is accessible to all Looked After Children.

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[17750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of supported lodgings in supporting the aims of the Staying Close programme.

Janet Daby:

This government is committed to providing support for care leavers to ensure they have the practical and emotional support they need as they move towards independence. The department intends to legislate, when parliamentary time allows, to ensure all local authorities consider whether care leavers (up to age 25) in their area require Staying Close support and, if their welfare requires it, provide that support.

Evaluation of the initial Staying Close pilots found clear improvements in outcomes for care leavers, including a 20% improvement in mental health outcomes, a 13% reduction in the number of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), and a 21% reduction in anti-social behaviour. The independent evaluations also found that Staying Close supported young people to develop and build the skills needed to prepare for independent living. Feedback showed that young people's life skills had improved after six months of participating in the project and that young people felt happier in themselves, had better stability in their accommodation and there was increased participation in activities, whether education, employment or wider activities.

The department has commissioned the Centre for Homelessness Impact to undertake a further evaluation of Staying Close's impact. This is due to report in early 2025.

The government supports the use of supported lodgings for care leavers. When working with the young person to review their individual needs and a suitable package of support through Staying Close they will be able to decide the best form of accommodation together. Any decisions should be tailored to the needs of the young person to help develop their confidence and skills for independent living and for their emotional health and wellbeing.

■ Childcare and Pre-school Education: Admissions

Matt Bishop: [\[17715\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that early education and care providers are adequately supported to provide places for 70,000 more children by autumn 2025.

Stephen Morgan:

Giving children the best start in life is key to the government's Opportunity Mission. Good parenting and high quality early education provide the foundation for children to achieve and thrive. This government is determined to ensure that parents have access to high quality, affordable and flexible early education and childcare.

The department is rolling out more government-funded childcare entitlements to help millions of families, working hand in hand with the early years sector to build a system that works for them, parents and, above all, children. This includes delivering 3,000 new and expanded school based nurseries to make high quality childcare accessible and available. As a first step, primary schools can now apply for up to £150,000 of £15 million capital funding, with the first stage of the plan set to support up to 300 new or expanded nurseries across England. High quality, school-based nursery provision is popular with parents, especially families with multiple children. It can help schools upgrade spare space whilst also providing early support to children and families, supporting their transition into primary school. School-based nursery settings have proportionally higher qualified staff and see lower staff turnover, providing more consistency of care for children. Proportionally, school-based nurseries also look after more children with special educational needs and disabilities and offer a higher proportion of places in the most deprived areas.

In 2024/25, early years providers are set to benefit from over £2 billion extra investment compared to last year, to support the rollout of 30 hours of government-funded early education from next September, rising in 2027/28 to over £4.1 billion. As announced in the Autumn Budget 2024, we expect to provide over £8 billion for the early years entitlements in 2025/26, which is around a 30% increase compared to 2024/25, as we continue to deliver the expansion to eligible working parents of children aged from nine months.

The planned September 2025 childcare rollout of 30 funded hours per week will go ahead, but there will be challenges, including providers securing enough staff and places to meet demand, with the capacity needed varying across the country. The department is supporting the sector to attract talented staff and childminders to join the workforce by creating conditions for improved recruitment. We are urging the public to 'do something BIG' and start a career working with small children through our national recruitment campaign. Our dedicated website also helps people find out more about gaining qualifications and search for existing job vacancies. In 20 local authorities, we are piloting initiatives to understand whether £1,000 in financial incentives will boost recruitment in early years alongside a childminder start-up grant scheme.

Skills Bootcamps for the early years are available and lead to an accelerated apprenticeship, and we are funding Early Years Initial Teacher Training as a route for new and existing staff to gain Early Years Teacher Status. To support childminders to join and stay in the profession, we have implemented new flexibilities to work with more people and spend more time working from non-domestic premises.

We are working closely with local areas and the early years sector to do everything we can to ensure there are enough places and the sector has the workforce it needs to provide those places and to bridge local gaps ahead of September 2025.

■ Children's Rights: Homelessness

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[17743\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to ensure that homeless children have the same rights of access to (a) education and (b) health care as looked-after children in corporate parentship.

Janet Daby:

The department knows that homelessness levels are far too high, and this can have a devastating impact on those affected, especially children. Too many children are spending years in temporary accommodation, at a point in their lives when they need space to play and develop, nutritious food to thrive and access to education.

We understand the physical and mental health impacts of poor housing on children and families. The Child Poverty Unit is exploring options with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), to encourage greater integration of health, housing, education and care services at a local level which will better meet the needs of children and families in poverty.

More detail on the approach and priorities for the Child Poverty Strategy is set out in the 23 October publication 'Tackling Child Poverty: Developing Our Strategy', which is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-child-poverty-developing-our-strategy>.

Through the supporting families programme and our reforms to family help from April 2025, we will ensure that more children and families can access the help and support they need at the earliest opportunity. Support will be delivered by community based, multi-disciplinary teams, made up of professionals from relevant agencies. This could include specialist homelessness advisors.

My right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, is leading cross-government work to deliver the long term solutions we need to get back on track to ending all forms of homelessness. This includes chairing a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, bringing together ministers from across government to develop a long term strategy.

We are also tackling the root causes of homelessness, including by delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation and building 1.5 million new homes over the next parliament.

MHCLG are already taking the first steps to get back on track to ending homelessness. As announced in the Autumn 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 2025/26.

This government will also abolish Section 21 'no fault' evictions with immediate effect, preventing private renters being exploited and discriminated against, and empowering people to challenge unreasonable rent increases.

In relation to healthcare, clearly homeless children have the same right to healthcare as children in any other situation in England. All children have equal access to use the NHS, and DHSC and the NHS are working together to ensure health inequalities in ease of access are mitigated.

■ Curriculum: Teaching Methods

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[17746\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of embedding (a) social and (b) emotional learning interventions into curriculums.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

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

The review group ran a call for evidence, receiving over 7000 responses, and held events over the autumn term to gather the views of education professionals and other experts and stakeholders, as well as parents, children and young people. The feedback received will help the review group to consider its next steps and recommendations.

The curriculum currently provides many opportunities for schools to promote pupils' social and emotional development. For example, through the national curriculum for citizenship at key stages 3 and 4, pupils should be taught about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.

Health education, which is compulsory for pupils in all state-funded schools, has a strong focus on mental wellbeing, including a recognition that mental wellbeing and physical health are linked. Health education should also support a school's whole-school approach to fostering pupil wellbeing and developing pupils' resilience and ability to self-regulate.

At primary school, pupils learn to recognise and talk about their emotions, the benefits of exercise and simple self-care techniques. At secondary school, pupils will learn about common types of mental ill-health and how to recognise the early signs of mental wellbeing concerns. Pupils are taught where and how to seek support, including recognising the triggers for seeking support. They receive guidance on who

they should speak to in school if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions.

The department is separately reviewing the relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) statutory guidance in addition to recommendations from the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review.

■ Free School Meals: Eligibility

Dr Simon Opher: [\[18419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she take steps to delegate powers to local authorities to (a) identify and (b) automatically register all children eligible for free school meals.

Dr Simon Opher: [\[18420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps with local authorities to extend provision of free school meals to school holidays.

Stephen Morgan:

There are currently around 2.1 million pupils eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM). The department recognises the vital role played by FSM and encourages all eligible families to take up their entitlement. To make this as easy as possible the department provides the Eligibility Checking System, which allows local authorities to quickly verify eligibility for FSM.

The department is aware of a range of measures aimed at maximising take up of FSM, including through approaches being trialled by local authorities. We welcome local authorities taking action to ensure government support reaches families, subject to them meeting legal and data-protections requirements.

In addition to FSM, the department supports families through the Holiday Activities and Food programme, which provides free childcare places, enriching activities and healthy meals to children from low-income families, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning throughout the school holidays.

We are also rolling out free breakfast clubs in every primary school, so children start the day ready to learn. This is part of the department's commitment to breaking down barriers to opportunity so that all children have the freedom to achieve and thrive in education.

The department is also working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to develop a child poverty strategy to reduce child poverty by tackling its root causes and giving every child the best start in life. The strategy will be published in the spring.

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

■ Pupils: Attendance

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési:

[17587]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps is she taking increase school attendance among children who are living in poverty.

Stephen Morgan:

Today, 4.3 million children are living in poverty in this country. Tackling child poverty is at the heart of breaking down barriers to opportunity and improving the life chances for every child. For too many children, living in poverty robs them of the opportunity to learn and to prosper.

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

This government will ensure school is the best place to be for every child, with free breakfast clubs in primary schools so that every child is on time and ready to learn, better mental health support through access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, and inclusion for children with special educational needs and disabilities within mainstream settings right across the age range.

Backed by £15 million, the department is also expanding its investment into attendance mentoring to reach 10,000 more children and cover an additional ten areas. These attendance mentors will provide one-to-one targeted support for persistently and severely absent pupils.

There is an absence epidemic in this country, with one in five children persistently absent. The department's 'Working together to improve school attendance' statutory guidance sets a clear expectations that where pupils face additional barriers which affect their attendance, schools should work with these families and put support in place to help them to attend. The guidance can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf. Where the barriers are outside of the school's control, all local partners should work together to support pupils and parents to access support to ensure regular attendance.

■ Schools: Attendance

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[17745]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to increase collaborative working at local authority level to improve school attendance.

Stephen Morgan:

The statutory 'working together to improve school attendance' guidance sets out that schools, trusts and local authorities should work together to tackle absence. The guidance makes clear that local authorities are expected to work with the child's parents and school to support them to return to regular and consistent education.

Local authorities are expected to build strong and collaborative relationships across a range of services and partners that can help pupils and families with specific attendance barriers. These services and partners can include health, youth justice, the voluntary and community sector, early help, children's social care, local safeguarding partnerships, special educational needs, educational psychologists, the police and housing support. Local authorities should encourage shared ownership of attendance improvement across these partners.

The guidance also includes the expectation that local authorities will hold regular targeting support meetings with schools as an opportunity to work collaboratively with them to discuss and agree support approaches for persistently absent pupils.

To support local authorities to implement the expectations in the guidance, including improving collaborative working, the department has offered each authority the support of an expert attendance adviser.

The guidance can be accessed here:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

■ Schools: Cornwall**Perran Moon:****[17686]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has consulted with all local schools in the Perranporth area as part of the review of the Perranporth Academy project; and when she expects the review to be concluded.

Catherine McKinnell:

A top priority for the government is to drive high and rising education standards for children across the country. The department is reviewing mainstream free school projects to ensure that they continue to meet localised need for places, offer value for money and are not to the detriment of other schools in the local area.

Departmental officials have worked closely with Truro and Penwith Academy Trust and Cornwall local authority to gather the required information. No decisions have yet been taken.

Stakeholders are welcome to submit their views to the department. These will be taken into consideration before a final decision is made by Ministers.

The review is ongoing. The department will update all trusts and local authorities on the next steps in the new year.

We will also provide an update on the overall review in due course.

■ Special Educational Needs

Ian Roome:

[\[17661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to improve support for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

High quality teaching is central to ensuring that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), are given the best possible opportunity to achieve in their education and as they move into adult life. The department is committed to recruiting an additional 6,500 new expert teachers over the course of this parliament. To support all teachers, the department is implementing a range of teacher training reforms to ensure teachers have the skills to support all pupils to succeed, including those with SEND. On 1 September 2024, the government introduced a new mandatory leadership level qualification for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs). The qualification will play a key role in improving outcomes for pupils with SEND, by ensuring SENCOs consistently receive high quality, evidence-based training on how best to support children with SEND.

High needs funding will also increase by almost £1 billion in 2025/26 compared to 2024/25, and we have announced £740 million of capital funding to create more specialist places, including in mainstream schools.

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[17741\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of (a) children of school age with complex SEND needs and (b) specialist educational places required for such children in the next five academic years.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government has inherited a growing tide of unmet need amongst children and young people.

The government does not forecast the number of school-aged pupils with complex needs as a specific category, but has produced national level estimates of the number of all children and young people with education, health and care (EHC) plans. As noted in the National Audit Office report, the department's central estimate is that, without policy interventions, the number of EHC plans will nearly double from approximately 518,000 in 2022/23 to just over 1,000,000 in 2032/33.

Starting from summer 2023, for the first time, the department has collected data from local authorities on capacity in special schools and special educational needs (SEN) units and resourced provision (attached to mainstream schools), which have been

published on GOV.UK. This shows that the government has inherited a landscape of rising demand for specialist provision within mainstream and special schools which is not being met. There were 148,000 special school places reported, with an additional 9,000 places reported in SEN units and 18,000 in resourced provision. Around 63% of special schools are at or over capacity. On average schools that are over capacity have around 12% more pupils than reported capacity.

Therefore, the department understands that many children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) still struggle to find a suitable school placement that is close to their home and meets their needs.

That is why earlier this month, the department announced £740 million in high needs capital funding for 2025/26. Local authorities can use this funding to adapt classrooms to be more inclusive and accessible and create specialist facilities within mainstream schools, alongside continuing to support placements in special schools for pupils with the most complex needs. It will pave the way for the government's wide-ranging long term plans for reform to help more pupils with SEND to have their needs met in mainstream schools.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Finance**

Steve Darling:

[\[18242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to announce the allocation by local authority for the £740 million of SEND funding.

Stephen Morgan:

The department allocates capital funding to local authorities to support them to meet their statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or who require alternative provision. Earlier this month, the department announced £740 million for high needs capital in 2025/26.

This capital 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 school places for pupils with the most complex needs.

This will be used to deliver this government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best life chances while fixing the foundations of the school system.

The department expects to confirm plans to allocate funding for the 2025/26 financial year by the end of March 2025 and will work with valued partners in the sector, schools, trusts and local authorities to ensure that children and young people can access the placements they need and deserve, restoring parents' trust.

■ Special Educational Needs: Training

Lauren Edwards:

[\[17707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take to improve training for teachers to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in (a) mainstream and (b) specialist education.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

All teachers are teachers of SEND, and high quality teaching is central to ensuring that pupils with SEND are given the best possible opportunity to achieve at school.

Consideration of SEND underpins the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework (CCF) and Early Career Framework (ECF), which were both produced with the support of sector experts. They have been designed around how to support all pupils to succeed, including those pupils identified within the four areas of need set out in the SEND Code of Practice. ITT courses must be designed so that teacher trainees can demonstrate that they meet all of the Teachers' Standards at the appropriate level, including the requirement in Standard 5, that all teachers must have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils. Headteachers use their professional judgement to identify any further training, including specific specialisms, for individual staff that is relevant to them, the school, and its pupils.

All mainstream schools must have a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) who must be a qualified teacher, or the head teacher, working at the school. On 1 September 2024, the government introduced a new mandatory leadership level National Professional Qualification (NPQ) for SENCOs. The NPQ will play a key role in improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND by ensuring SENCOs consistently receive high quality, evidence-based training. This is crucial given the central role SENCOs play in supporting pupils with SEND.

■ Truancy: Fines

Bell Ribeiro-Addy:

[\[18183\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many fines for school absence were issued to the parents of neurodiverse children who missed school for a reason relating to their condition in the last 12 months; and if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of those trends.

Stephen Morgan:

The information requested is not held by this department. The department collects aggregate data on penalty notices issued for unauthorised absence from local authorities in England, through the annual parental responsibility measures attendance census. No information is collected on characteristics of the children concerned. The available data is published here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/parental-responsibility-measures>.

On improving school attendance, this government is acting decisively to tackle absence via a new approach rooted in responsibility, partnership and belonging. This includes supporting schools and recognising they have important responsibilities by creating a welcoming, engaging and inclusive environment for children, but that it is also a parent's legal responsibility to send their children to school every day that they can.

We know that some pupils face additional barriers to attending school regularly. Our 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance particularly emphasises the importance of support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and mental ill health who often need more individual consideration due to the wider barriers they face.

The new national framework for fixed penalty notices, which has been in place since the start of this academic year, strengthens protections for parents of those with additional needs by, for absence cases other than holiday, introducing an expectation that attendance support will have been provided before a penalty notice can be used. The vast majority of penalty notices for unauthorised absence (89%) are issued for term time holidays.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO**■ Energy: Prices****Mr Lee Dillon:****[18044]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing measures to prevent households that have chosen not to install smart meters from higher energy tariffs.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The mechanism for protecting consumers from disproportionate energy prices is the Price Cap, which ensures default tariffs are priced efficiently. This protects households who are on their supplier's default tariff. The level of the price cap is the same for both smart and non-smart meter default tariffs.

■ Imports: China

Sir John Hayes:

[\[17509\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the impact of the accelerated energy grid decarbonisation target on the UK's reliance on imports from China.

Michael Shanks:

The Government works closely with industry to maintain a detailed picture of foreign involvement in critical national infrastructure. Foreign involvement in critical national infrastructure undergoes the highest levels of scrutiny, with the government and industry working alongside each other to monitor and mitigate the security risks in the energy sector and its supply chain. A positive trading relationship benefits both the UK and China, and we continue to recognise the importance of trade and investment from China, with whom we will co-operate where we can, compete where we need to, and challenge where we must.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018

Ruth Jones:

[\[18396\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to review the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is finalising its post-implementation review of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018. The report into the review will be published shortly.

■ Bluetongue Disease

Edward Argar:

[\[17544\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the (a) economic impact of the bluetongue restrictions on affected farmers and (b) animal health impact of the bluetongue restriction.

Daniel Zeichner:

Government recognises that keepers and businesses can be affected not only by the impacts of bluetongue disease on animals, but also by disease control measures. That is why Defra seeks to minimise these burdens as far as practically possible, easing them where safe to do so using exemptions under licenses, whilst maintaining the integrity and efficacy of measures intended to mitigate the risk of disease spread.

The restricted zone currently in force has contained and slowed the spread of disease and prevented disease circulation in the areas of the country with the highest

cattle and sheep density. Defra are aware of the significant challenges that affected farmers and businesses have faced, and we continue to work closely with industry representatives. Restrictions remain under continuous review, including their likely economic impact, and any decisions are based on the latest scientific evidence and veterinary advice.

■ **Cats and Dogs: Smuggling**

Ruth Jones: [\[18395\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his planned timetable is to introduce legislation to end (a) puppy and (b) kitten smuggling.

Daniel Zeichner:

As outlined in our manifesto, we are committed to ending puppy smuggling. 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 close loopholes in the non-commercial pet travel rules that are abused by unscrupulous traders and give the Government powers to prevent the supply of low-welfare pets to the United Kingdom.

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

■ **Dangerous Dogs**

Ruth Jones: [\[18394\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of launching a (a) comprehensive and (b) holistic review of the causes of dog attacks.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra is working with the police, local authorities and animal welfare groups to help prevent attacks by encouraging responsible dog ownership, to ensure dog control issues are addressed before they escalate and to make sure the full force of the law is applied. As part of this work, we will continue to consider how we can improve data collection and recording on dog attacks so that we are in a better position to take action.

■ **Dogs: Smuggling**

Ben Maguire: [\[17736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to help prevent international puppy smuggling.

Daniel Zeichner:

As outlined in our manifesto, we are committed to ending puppy smuggling. 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 close loopholes in the non-commercial pet travel rules that are abused by unscrupulous traders and give the government powers to prevent the supply of low-welfare pets to Great Britain's pet market.

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

■ Flood Control: Finance

Robbie Moore: [\[18409\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether communities flooded in Storm Bert will be eligible to access funding from the Frequently Flooded Allowance.

Robbie Moore: [\[18410\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the £100million Frequently Flooded Allowance will continue to be ringfenced funding.

Robbie Moore: [\[18411\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when a second round of schemes benefitting from the Frequently Flooded Allowance will be announced.

Emma Hardy:

We are investing £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences. The list of projects to receive Government funding in 2025/26 will be consented in the usual way through Regional Flood and Coastal Committees with local representation.

Longer term funding decisions will be made at the next Spending Review.

■ Flood Control: Huntingdon

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[17933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16252 on Flood Control: Cambridgeshire, what steps the Government is taking to improve the condition of the Environment Agency's high consequence assets in Huntingdon constituency.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) received an allocation of £155,000 for asset maintenance in the Huntingdon Constituency for 2024/25 and prioritises this budget towards higher consequence areas to ensure the biggest possible benefit to people and property. Alongside maintenance activities, the EA also has planned capital investment of £6.5 million in assets in the Huntingdon constituency across the current 6-year Capital Programme. We continually monitor asset condition and prioritise the funding available based on these ongoing condition assessments.

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.

■ Food: Cybersecurity

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[17325\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of domestic cybersecurity risks on food biosecurity.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra assesses the potential impacts of cybersecurity risks along with other risks to the food supply chain as outlined in the National Risk Register (NRR) and supporting assessment. Defra works with the Cabinet Office, as leads for the NRR, and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, as the Lead Government Department for cybersecurity, to ensure the range of potential impacts on the food system from these types of risks are included in their assessment.

To inform this, Defra engages with external stakeholders to understand how they prepare for cybersecurity risks whilst promoting vigilance and improvements to resilience.

■ Housing: Rural Areas

Edward Morello: [\[17451\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to secure funding for rural housing enablers to support housing initiatives in rural areas.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is committed to funding the Rural Housing Enabler programme until 31 March 2025. It is also providing over £5 billion total housing investment in 2025-26 to boost the supply of new housing, including in rural areas. This includes a £500 million top up to the Affordable Homes Programme. Other funding allocations for individual programmes for the next financial year will be determined in upcoming months through the department's business planning exercise and announced in due course.

■ Pets: Animal Welfare

David Chadwick: [\[18475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle trends in the (a) number of abandoned pets and (b) pressure on animal rescue centres.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra regularly meets animal welfare stakeholders to understand issues and trends affecting the sector.

Defra welcomes the support that the animal sector has provided through pet food banks and financial support with veterinary treatment; and the financial support that the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes (ADCH) provided to its members experiencing financial difficulties due to cost-of-living pressures.

The animal sector offers helpful advice to potential pet owners on the responsibilities that come with pet ownership including free guides on the estimated lifetime costs of owning a pet.

■ Recycling

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[17206]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to improve recycling rates.

Mary Creagh:

The collection and packaging reforms as a whole will increase recycling and reduce our reliance on imported and virgin materials. These reforms are estimated to increase the municipal recycling rate in England from around 44% in 2024 to over 55% in 2035, mostly driven by [Simpler Recycling](#).

Simpler Recycling in England will reform the recycling system. Across England, people will be able to recycle the same materials, whether at home, work or school, putting an end to the confusion over what can and cannot be recycled in different parts of the country.

Under pEPR, producers who pay fees to cover household packaging disposal costs will have their fees modulated (varied) from the second year of pEPR (2026/27). Producers who use unrecyclable packaging (such as polystyrene or black plastic), will have their fees increased, thereby incentivising them to use packaging that can be recycled easily.

The Deposit Return Scheme will complement the other collection and packaging reforms to help drive recycling levels, reduce littering, and promote a circular economy.

■ Sewage: Cornwall

Ben Maguire:

[17735]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many sewage discharges into (a) rivers and (b) seas have occurred so far this year in Cornwall.

Emma Hardy:

The Environment Agency (EA) will publish 2024 Event Duration Monitoring data, showing how long and how often storm overflows have been used, in March 2025. The data for previous years is available online, [here](#).

From 1 January, companies will be required to publish discharge data from storm overflows in near real time. This duty falls under section 141DA of the Water Industry Act 1991, as inserted by section 81 of the Environment Act 2021. To support this,

Water UK recently released its National Storm Overflow Hub to provide this data on the same site for the whole of England.

The Water (Special Measures) Bill will strengthen these provisions. Clause 3 will require companies to publish discharge data for emergency overflows in near real time. This will ensure that discharge data from all sewage overflows will be published in near real time.

■ Sewage: Waste Disposal

Peter Fortune:

[\[16901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation on Draft information and guidance on storm overflows, published on 21 November 2024.

Emma Hardy:

On the 21 of November, Defra launched a two-month consultation on updated technical guidance on storm overflows in England.

Defra are looking for feedback from water companies, trade bodies, environmental non-government organisations and other key stakeholders including industry groups, research institutes, and engineering and environmental management organisations.

As this is technical guidance on the management of storm overflows in England, we have targeted the consultation at water and sewerage companies, trade bodies and around 30 environmental non-governmental organisations.

More information can be found on the [GOV.UK page](#) for the consultation.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

■ China: Sanctions

Wendy Morton:

[\[17541\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of UK sanctions on Chinese (a) people and (b) businesses.

Catherine West:

UK sanctions are designed and targeted to deter and disrupt malign behaviour, and to demonstrate our defence of fundamental principles, including democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The FCDO regularly reviews the effectiveness and impact of our sanctions regimes. Any assessment will depend on the intended purposes of each individual regime, which are set out in the regulations for that regime. The FCDO keeps all evidence and potential designations under close review.

■ Diplomatic Immunity

Chris Law:

[\[16503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has granted any Special Mission Immunity certificates to any (a) visitor or (b) prospective visitor since 1 January 2024.

Catherine West:

Government officials from any country can apply for and be granted special mission certificates as part of official visits to the UK. As set out in a Written Ministerial Statement by the former Foreign Secretary dated 4 March 2013, a special mission is a temporary mission, representing a State, which is sent by one State to another with the consent of the latter, in order to carry out official engagements on behalf of the sending State. Since 1 January 2024, the FCDO has given consent and issued certificates to two special mission status visits to the UK for the following officials and their delegations:

- Mr Benny Gantz, Minister of the State of Israel on 6 March, visiting the then Foreign Secretary.
- Lieutenant General Herzl Halevi, Chief of the General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces.

■ Herzl Halevi

Brian Leishman:

[\[18276\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether Herzl Halevi was given special mission diplomatic immunity to visit the UK in November 2024.

Catherine West:

Government officials from any country can apply for and be granted special mission certificates as part of official visits to the UK. As set out in a Written Ministerial Statement by the former Foreign Secretary dated 4 March 2013, a special mission is a temporary mission, representing a State, which is sent by one State to another with the consent of the latter, in order to carry out official engagements on behalf of the sending State. The FCDO gave consent for special mission status for the visit to the UK on 24-25 November of Lieutenant General Herzl Halevi, Chief of the General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, and delegation.

■ Human Rights: Xinjiang

Andrew Griffith:

[\[17903\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Minister of State for Trade Policy and Economic Security's oral contribution of 3 December 2024, Official Report, column 174, whether his Department has conducted any independent visits to Xinjiang to investigate human rights abuses since 5 July.

Catherine West:

This Government stands firm on human rights, including in Xinjiang, where China continues to persecute and arbitrarily detain Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities.

We continue to monitor the situation closely, including by conducting independent visits to areas of major concern wherever possible, and supporting reputable NGOs in exposing and reacting to human rights violations.

International Development Association: Finance**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[17513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much he plans to allocate to the World Bank Group International Development Association replenishment fund in the next five years.

Anneliese Dodds:

On 27 November, the UK made a pledge of £1.98 billion to the 21st replenishment for the International Development Association (IDA21). This is a 40% increase on the UK's contribution to IDA20 - and will support IDA in tackling poverty and addressing the impacts of climate change. IDA21 runs between July 2025 and ends by June 2028. We will engage closely with partners to identify policy and financing needs for future replenishments.

Laboratory for AI Security Research**David Reed:**[\[R\] \[17726\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled UK and its allies must stay one step ahead in new AI arms race, published on 25 November 2024, how will industry investment play a role in the development of autonomous cyber tooling at the Laboratory for AI Security Research.

Stephen Doughty:

The Laboratory for AI Security Research (LASR) is at an early stage. We will be working closely with industry and academia to define research priorities. Examples could include the role of AI security on our critical national infrastructure and how we can raise the quality of our cybersecurity to account for AI. Most of LASR's work will be classified and will benefit the UK's AI Security eco-system. The programme is also designed to facilitate industry investment and support the Government's growth agenda.

David Reed:[\[17727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled UK and its allies must stay one step ahead in new AI arms race, published on 25 November 2024, which Department will have responsibility for the Laboratory for AI Security Research; and what steps the Government plans to take to ensure the laboratory's work informs the strategies and operations of all relevant departments.

Stephen Doughty:

The Laboratory for AI Security Research (LASR) concept was developed jointly across HMG and is funded initially by the cross-Government Integrated Security Fund (ISF). LASR is an FCDO-led ISF programme co-designed and governed to inform the strategies and operations of all relevant departments.

David Reed:[\[17728\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled UK and its allies must stay one step ahead in new AI arms race, published on 25 November 2024, whether the Laboratory for AI Security Research will be operational in time to inform the Strategic Defence Review.

Stephen Doughty:

AI security has clear implications for our national security. The programme to deliver the Laboratory for AI Security Research has only just started its work and will bring together government, academia and industry to share information and work together to enhance AI security and inform many aspects of government's work.

David Reed:[\[17729\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled UK and its allies must stay one step ahead in new AI arms race, published on 25 November 2024, whether the Ministry of Defence will hold equity in the Laboratory for AI Security Research.

Stephen Doughty:

As the Laboratory for AI Security Research is a cross-Government initiative, it will involve all relevant departments including the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory.

David Reed:[\[17730\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled UK and its allies must stay one step ahead in new AI arms race, published on 25 November 2024, what his planned timetable is for establishing the Laboratory for AI Security Research.

Stephen Doughty:

The Laboratory for AI Security Research began its work in September, bringing together government, industry and academia to agree joint research priorities and commission cutting-edge research to address the impact of AI on national security.

David Reed:[\[17731\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled UK and its allies must stay one step ahead in new AI arms race, published on 25 November 2024, where will the headquarters for the Laboratory for AI Security Research be located.

Stephen Doughty:

HMG will lead the Laboratory for AI Security Research. Its research activities will be conducted across the UK and will include a range of UK universities, including the University of Oxford and Queen's University, Belfast.

David Reed:**[R] [17732]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the press release entitled UK and its allies must stay one step ahead in new AI arms race, published on 25 November 2024, how will the Laboratory for AI Security Research complement the work of existing cyber defence (a) mechanisms and (b) organisations.

Stephen Doughty:

The Laboratory for AI Security Research (LASR) was designed to build on the knowledge and experience of addressing cyber security and other national security activities across government, academia and industry. LASR is designed to complement or enhance existing mechanisms and organisations, as well as offer new ways of working where appropriate.

■ Sudan: Humanitarian Aid**Apsana Begum:****[17609]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the Government has taken steps to provide aid to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Sudan.

Anneliese Dodds:

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is widespread and underreported in Sudan. Cases have increased significantly since the start of the conflict, particularly in Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan. As part of the UK's Official Development Assistance to Sudan and neighbouring countries, which now stands at £226.5 million, we provide support to survivors of SGBV through partners such as UNICEF, the Danish Refugee Council and the Sudan Humanitarian Fund. On 26 September, the UK convened an event at the UN General Assembly with Dutch and Swiss partners to address conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan, drawing international attention to the plight of women and girls and stressing the importance of survivor-centred, local and women-led response efforts. The UK also co-led a Resolution at the UNSC with Sierra Leone on the protection of civilians which failed to pass due to a Russian veto. We have also pivoted our existing programmes to focus more on prevention of SGBV, protection and care for rape survivors, including the provision of clinical treatment, dignity kits and psycho-social services.

Apsana Begum:**[17611]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of reports of sexual and gender-based violence in Sudan.

Anneliese Dodds:

In October, the UK successfully led the mandate renewal of the Human Rights Council UN Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan (FFM), which independently investigates credible evidence of human rights violations and abuses in Sudan, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The FFM has found that SGBV, in particular rape and gang rape, is widespread and continues to occur on a large scale across Sudan. Findings from the FFM, as well as evidence from the UK-funded Sudan Witness project which collects open-source evidence of harms against civilians, have informed our programming in Sudan. Since the outbreak of conflict in April 2023, we have pivoted existing programmes to increase focus on SGBV prevention and response. In doubling the UK's aid commitment to Sudan to £226.5 million, more funding to the Sudan Humanitarian Fund will also enable increased support to survivors. In addition, on 26 September, the UK convened an event at the UN General Assembly with Dutch and Swiss partners to address conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan, drawing international attention to the plight of women and girls and stressing the importance of survivor-centred, local and women-led response efforts. The UK also co-led a Resolution at the UNSC with Sierra Leone on the protection of civilians which failed to pass due to a Russian veto.

■ Tsai Ing-wen**Wendy Morton:**[\[17543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to facilitate an inward visit to the UK from former President of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen.

Catherine West:

The UK's longstanding position on Taiwan has not changed. The UK does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan but a strong unofficial relationship based on deep and growing ties in a wide range of areas and underpinned by shared democratic values. There is a longstanding pattern of senior visits between the UK and Taiwan, including many conducted independently of HMG.

■ UN Security Council: Public Appointments**Blair McDougall:**[\[17309\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make it his policy to support a female appointment as General Secretary of the United Nations.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK supports a merit-based appointment for UN Secretary-General, based on principles of transparency and inclusiveness. The Government would like to see women's representation strengthen across the multilateral system, and we welcome the Secretary-General's ambition for gender parity. We encourage member states to nominate women for the top jobs. The UK is proud to continue to support the

objectives of the UN's Senior Women Talent Pipeline (SWTP), including programme funding totalling £50,000 in the current financial year.

■ Zimbabwe: Elections

Daisy Cooper: [\[17233\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made representations to the Commonwealth Secretariat on publication of the independent report of the Commonwealth Observer Group on Zimbabwe's elections in 2023.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK greatly values the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on observation missions. The full report of the Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2023 Zimbabwe Harmonised elections was published on 6 November. We note some of the findings in the report and support the recommendations.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Alcoholism and Drugs: Death

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[18170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps this Department is taking to reduce (a) drug- and (b) alcohol-related deaths.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[18172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to raise awareness of the harms of (a) drug and (b) alcohol misuse.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 10 December 2024]: Drug-related deaths are tragically at record highs, especially in deprived areas. We are committed to tackling this problem through working across health, policing, and wider public services. For example, we recently took legislative action to expand access to naloxone, meaning more services and professionals are able to supply this life-saving opioid overdose antidote medication.

In addition to the Public Health Grant, the Department allocated local authorities £267 million in 2024/25 to improve the quality and capacity of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery. An additional £105 million from the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is improving treatment pathways and recovery, housing, and employment outcomes for people affected by drug and alcohol use. Future targeted funding for drug and alcohol treatment services beyond 2025 will be announced very shortly.

Alcohol-specific deaths are also at the highest rates on record, having increased dramatically during the pandemic. Through our mission-driven Government, we will

prioritise actions targeted at reversing this trend. As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, over £30 million of national funding has been invested between 2019 and 2025, on an ambitious programme to establish new, or optimise existing, Alcohol Care Teams (ACTs) in the 25% hospitals with the highest need, which is 47 out of 188 eligible sites in England. ACTs identify people in hospital whose ill health is related to alcohol use, commence treatment for alcohol dependence, and refer to community alcohol treatment on discharge.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has an action plan to reduce drug and alcohol-related deaths. In light of the recent data, this plan will be reviewed to ensure that it is grounded in the latest understanding of the drivers of drug and alcohol related deaths, and is responding to these. In addition, earlier this year the Department published guidance for local authorities and their partnerships on how to review adult drug and alcohol-related deaths and near-fatal overdoses to prevent future deaths. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-drug-and-alcohol-deaths-partnership-review-process>

Through our Health Mission, the Government has committed to prioritising preventative public health measures to support people to live longer, healthier lives. The Department will continue to work across Government to understand how best to reduce alcohol-related harms. The OHID, with the support of partners from the devolved administrations, has developed the first ever United Kingdom clinical guidelines on alcohol treatment, which are expected to be published in the coming months. The aim of the guidelines is to promote and support good practice and improve quality of service provision, resulting in better outcomes.

Education on drug use is an essential part of harm reduction and prevention and is a statutory component of relationship, sex, and health education in England. Lesson plans and other resources to support teachers are being updated, and there will be increased emphasis on the risks of synthetic drugs. The Department has worked with the Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education Association to develop the lesson plans on alcohol and drugs, and has commissioned an update of the resources to be published later this year. The Government also has an alcohol and drug information and advice service called Talk to FRANK, which aims to reduce alcohol and drug use and its harms by providing information and increasing awareness for young people, parents, and concerned others. Further information on Talk to FRANK is available at the following link:

<https://www.talktofrank.com/>

■ Alcoholism and Drugs: Rehabilitation

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[18171]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken to ensure the availability of rehabilitation treatment for people with (a) drug and (b) alcohol dependencies in (i) Slough constituency and (ii) Berkshire.

Caroline Voaden:

[18284]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the funding for local authorities to provide drug and alcohol support services.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 10 December 2024]: Drug and alcohol treatment is funded through the Public Health Grant. In addition to the Public Health Grant, the Department allocated local authorities £267 million in 2024/25 to improve the quality and capacity of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery. An additional £105 million from the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is improving treatment pathways and recovery, housing, and employment outcomes for people affected by drug and alcohol use. Future targeted funding for drug and alcohol treatment services beyond 2025 will be announced very shortly. The Department will write directly to each local authority to set out indicative allocations for 2025/26, which will be subject to departmental and HM Treasury approvals, so final allocations could vary. We understand the importance of funding certainty for informing local system's operational decision making and future planning, and we are engaging with commissioners and providers on this.

My Rt. Hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has also made it clear that the Government will conclude a multi-year Spending Review in the first half of 2025. In future, we anticipate that Spending Reviews will be set every two years to cover a three-year period, including a one-year overlap with the previous Spending Review, helping build in greater certainty and stability over public finances.

The Department is focused on supporting local areas to deliver high quality drug and alcohol treatment services, including in the Slough constituency and Berkshire. This includes additional investment in 2024/25 in the drug and alcohol treatment and recovery systems of £950,455 in Slough, and £1,860,131 in the wider Berkshire area, through a range of specific grants. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities has also produced a Commissioning Quality Standard which provides guidance in commissioning effective alcohol and drug treatment and recovery services, and a range of wider guidance and data that will support the delivery of high-quality treatment and recovery services. Further information on the Commissioning Quality Standard is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commissioning-quality-standard-alcohol-and-drug-services>

■ Autoimmune Diseases: Health Education and Research

Chris Kane:

[17966]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to (a) support research into and (b) promote awareness of (i) Guillain-Barré Syndrome, (ii)

Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy and (iii) other related inflammatory neuropathies.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to improving the lives of those living with rare diseases, such as rare inflammatory neuropathies. The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities, collaboratively developed with the rare disease community, which include increasing awareness of rare diseases among healthcare professionals and improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. We remain committed to delivering under the framework and will publish an annual England action plan in 2025.

Pioneering research is an underpinning theme of the UK Rare Diseases Framework, and the Department funds and supports research into rare diseases through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). In the last five financial years, multiple studies, including one that is currently live, on rare inflammatory neuropathies have been supported by NIHR infrastructure.

The NHS Genomics Education Programme is working to increase overall awareness of rare diseases among healthcare professionals. Guillain-Barré syndrome, chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy, and other inflammatory neuropathies are part of the core training curriculum for neurology trainees, for which competency has to be demonstrated before being placed on the specialist register.

■ **Bowel Cancer: Screening**

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[18351\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to reduce the minimum age for bowel screening to 50 by the end of 2025.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England is responsible for delivering the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening programme, including planning for the age extension in the programme from 60 down to 50 years old.

The age extension for bowel screening is already underway. NHS England started in April 2021 with the 56-year-old cohort and, based on modelling and clinical advice, has planned to gradually reduce to the age of 50 years old by 2025. This has been done to ensure that screening centres could manage any required increase in colonoscopy capacity.

■ **Cancer: Databases**

Abtisam Mohamed:

[\[17949\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what his planned timetable is for when cancer sites will have recurrence data collection mandated to align with the collection of breast cancer recurrence data.

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Disease Registration Service (NDRS), part of NHS England, collects patient data on cancer as well as congenital anomalies and rare diseases. The NDRS has been collecting recurrence data for non-primary cancers via data submissions as part of the Cancer Outcomes and Services Dataset since 2013. Recurrence data can also be obtained from the [Cancer Waiting Times](#) treatment dataset for diagnosed cancer patients.

The Diagnostic Imaging Data Set (DIDS) is a central collection of detailed information about diagnostic imaging tests carried out on National Health Service patients, published by NHS England. Development of DIDS version 2.0 has commenced with the gathering of requirements from various stakeholders including NHS England, NHS Data Model and Dictionary, providers, and system suppliers. One of the requirements under consideration is the addition of an alert to identify if the imaging showed a suspected or confirmed cancer, recurrence, or progression. Such an alert could improve recording of the progression to metastatic status or the recurrence of cancer. Development of DIDS version 2.0 provides a window of opportunity to both reduce the burden of data collection, while improving the value of the dataset in assessing clinical outcomes.

■ Cancer: Rehabilitation**Abtisam Mohamed:**[\[17948\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take ensure there is sufficient provision of (a) rehabilitation and (b) prehabilitation for cancer patients across all cancer alliances.

Andrew Gwynne:

National Health Service trusts and cancer alliances are responsible for ensuring that plans are in place to meet the needs of patients in their localities. Therefore, the Department does not have additional plans to ensure there is provision of rehabilitation and prehabilitation for cancer patients across all cancer alliance areas.

A range of resources are available to the NHS workforce to support prehabilitation, rehabilitation, and physical activity. For example, NHS England provides the PROsPer Cancer Prehabilitation and Rehabilitation learning programme, which aims to support allied health professionals and the wider healthcare workforce in developing their skills in providing personalised care, prehabilitation, and rehabilitation in the cancer pathway. This programme forms part of the Personalised Care Institute's library of personalised care training for all healthcare professions.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control**Rupert Lowe:**[\[17362\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of Covid-19 lockdowns on trends in people's quality-adjusted life years.

Andrew Gwynne:

It is vital that we carefully consider all the impacts and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, both from the pandemic itself and the measures taken to address it. The intention of the lockdowns during COVID-19 was to save lives and protect the health of the population, and to protect the National Health Service, but it is also important to consider the other impacts on society and the public's health.

During the pandemic, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies commissioned and published a series of papers on the impact of the pandemic, including impacts on morbidity and mortality. These papers presented the net impacts of the pandemic and highlighted the difficulty in separating out the impact of infections, interventions, and voluntary changes in behaviour.

It isn't possible for any assessment to retrospectively attribute impacts specifically to lockdowns, in part because we don't know what would have happened without lockdowns in place.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination**Richard Foord:****[17284]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of allowing carers to receive covid-19 vaccinations on the NHS.

Andrew Gwynne:

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

This advice is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-in-2025-and-spring-2026-jcvi-advice/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-in-2025-and-spring-2026#:~:text=the%20JCVI%20webpage,-.Advice%20on%20vaccination%20in%20spring%202025,care%20home%20for%20older%20adults>

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

Rupert Lowe:**[17985]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the cost effectiveness of the covid-19 vaccine booster programme, in the context of the findings on the impact of vaccination take-up in care homes on resident mortality in the report by Sourafel Girma and David Paton entitled Using double-debiased machine learning to estimate the impact of Covid-19 vaccination on mortality and staff absences in elderly care homes, published in European Economic Review, Volume 170, November 2024.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to protecting those most vulnerable to COVID-19 through vaccination, as guided by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI considers the cost effectiveness of immunisation strategies, alongside a range of data, including epidemiological and vaccine effectiveness data, when formulating its advice. On 13 November 2024, the JCVI published advice on the COVID-19 vaccination programme in 2025 and spring 2026. This advice is available at the following link:

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

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

■ Dental Services: Ealing Central and Acton**Dr Rupa Huq:****[17837]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase provision for NHS dentists in Ealing Central and Acton constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

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 the 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.

The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to the integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For the Ealing Central and Acton constituency, this is the NHS Northwest London ICB.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Staff**Mr Peter Bedford:****[18057]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many employee settlement agreements there were in his Department in each year since 2020; and what the total value of such agreements is.

Karin Smyth:

I can confirm that since 2020 to date, the Department has had one settlement agreement in 2024. The settlement agreement was for the value of £20,000.

■ Futibatinib**Mark Ferguson:****[18237]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what funding is available for patients to receive the immunotherapy drug Futibatinib through the NHS; and what criteria his Department uses to determine whether a patient is eligible for any funding.

Mark Ferguson:[\[18238\]](#)

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

Karin Smyth:

NHS England funds the use of licensed medicines that have been recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Futibatinib is licensed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and has been recommended by the NICE for the treatment of previously treated advanced cholangiocarcinoma with FGFR2 fusion or rearrangement. However, Taiho Pharma Europe, the company that markets futibatinib, has advised NHS England that they are not currently able to supply it to the National Health Service. Patients with previously treated advanced cholangiocarcinoma with FGFR2 fusion or rearrangement are able to access a different treatment, pemigatinib, which is also licensed and recommended by the NICE for this indication.

Health: Children**Helen Maguire:**[\[18073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to tackle health inequality caused by childhood poverty.

Andrew Gwynne:

Tackling child poverty is at the heart of the Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity, and its commitment to raising the healthiest generation of children in history.

The Department is working closely with the Child Poverty Taskforce to develop and deliver an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty, tackle the root causes, and give every child the best start in life. An important part of this will be alleviating the negative experience of living in poverty, through supporting families and enhancing public services.

The National Health Service also makes a central contribution to tackling inequalities, in access to services, patient experience, and healthcare outcomes. For example, the 2024/2025 NHS Priorities and Operational Planning Guidance makes explicit the requirement to address the inequalities of healthcare facing children and young people.

Heart Diseases: Young People**Kate Osborne:**[\[17247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to stop young sudden cardiac deaths; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) increasing the availability of ECG testing for young people and (b) ensuring doctors are sufficiently trained to interpret ECGs in fit and active young people.

Andrew Gwynne:

The UK National Screening Committee does not recommend offering screening for sudden cardiac death (SCD) in people under the age of 39 years old. Research showed that current tests are not accurate enough to use in young people without symptoms. Individuals with the condition may receive a negative test result, a false negative, giving them false reassurance.

Doctors are already trained to interpret electrocardiograms in fit and active young people. To stop young SCDs, the consensus is to focus on rapid identification and care of people who are likely to be at risk of SCD, due to a family link or because they have had symptoms, and to train people to carry out cardiopulmonary resuscitation and to use defibrillators.

NHS England has published guidance for inherited cardiac conditions, which requires services to investigate patients with previously undiagnosed cardiac disease, suggestive symptoms, or from families with sudden unexplained deaths. Where a genetic variation is identified, cascade testing is offered to relatives based on risk.

■ HIV Infection: Diagnosis**Bobby Dean:**[\[17927\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department are taking to tackle changes in rates of HIV diagnoses among heterosexual men and women.

Andrew Gwynne:

HIV is a priority for the Government, and we have commissioned a new HIV Action Plan for 2025 to 2030, to achieve no new HIV transmissions within England by 2030, which we aim to publish in summer 2025.

The new action plan will include a focus on ensuring equitable access to HIV prevention programmes, and scaling up HIV testing with a particular focus on heterosexual men and women.

■ HIV Infection: Health Services**Bobby Dean:**[\[17930\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the number of people with diagnosed HIV who are not currently in care; what research it has conducted into the reasons for disengagement from care; and what funding is available to support programmes aimed at re-engaging such people with HIV services.

Andrew Gwynne:

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has estimated that the number of people with diagnosed HIV who are not currently in care, which is defined as not attending care for at least 15 months, in 2023 was 4,960. This represents 5.3% of people diagnosed with HIV.

A retention and re-engagement in HIV care task and finish group was established in 2023, that considered the available research and evidence. This included the UKHSA Positive Voices survey, which presents key indicators for HIV stigma, which are closely linked to retention and disengagement from care. This work is being considered as part of the development of the new HIV Action Plan, which we plan to publish in summer 2025.

As part of the HIV Action Plan, NHS England invested £20 million for the roll out of the Blood Borne Viruses opt-out Emergency Department testing programme in extremely high HIV prevalence areas, which helped identify and re-engage more than 1,300 individuals with HIV services during its first 28 months. A further investment of £20 million was provided by the Department to evaluate the expansion of the programme to 46 high prevalence emergency departments in England.

On 28 November 2024 the Prime Minister announced further funding of £27 million for the extension of the HIV Opt-Out Testing Programme in 2025/26. 10% of this funding and of the second £20 million is assigned to peer support, delivered by the voluntary and community sector, and is aimed at linking and retaining people in care.

■ HIV Infection: Screening

Bobby Dean:

[\[17929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to extend opt-out HIV testing beyond emergency departments.

Andrew Gwynne:

On 28 November 2024, the Prime Minister announced a further £27 million of funding for the continuation of the HIV Emergency Department opt-out testing programme for 2025/26. As part of the extension, more than 90 sites will be offered funding to continue or begin the roll out of HIV opt out testing until March 2026, including St George's, Epsom, and St Helier hospitals.

NHS England will evaluate the costs and feasibility of further extending this programme regarding hepatitis B and C opt-out testing, once budgets for 2025/26 are confirmed, and expects to provide an update on their decision in the early new year.

There are currently no plans to extend opt-out HIV testing beyond emergency departments. However, the Department, together with the UK Health and Security Agency, and NHS England are working together in the development of a new HIV Action Plan, which will include a focus on scaling up HIV testing, and which we aim to publish in summer 2025.

■ IVF: Payments

Jim Shannon:

[\[17813\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of increasing the payments made to women for their eggs from 1 October 2024 on trends in the number of (a) low income women and (b) students who may undergo egg retrieval in exchange for money.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has no plans to make an assessment, as the compensation rate for egg donation is set by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), as provided for in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. The HFEA has advised that the increase in donor compensation from 1 October 2024 reflects the rise in inflation since the compensation rates were first introduced in 2011. Academic research in the United Kingdom has consistently found that donating eggs and sperm is driven by altruism, and HFEA published data shows that egg and sperm donors in England from 2011 to 2020 lived in similar or more affluent socio-economic areas than the general population.

Medicine: Training**Nadia Whittome:** [\[18413\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of financial support provided to medical students through the NHS bursary.

Karin Smyth:

The NHS Bursary funding arrangements are reviewed annually ahead of the start of each academic year.

We have applied an uplift of 2% to all NHS Bursary maintenance grants and allowances for the academic year 2024/25. This is the first time the maintenance grant has been uplifted since 2015.

Mpox: Disease Control**Dr Beccy Cooper:** [\[18036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to monitor the rise in cases in the more spreadable variant of mpox now detected in the UK.

Andrew Gwynne:

There are two distinct types of the mpox virus: clade I and clade II. The previous significant outbreak in the United Kingdom in 2022 was from clade II. Clade I is currently classified as a high consequence infectious disease. The risk to the UK population remains low. We expect to see the occasional imported case of Clade Ib mpox in the UK.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) continues to closely monitor mpox epidemiology and has well established surveillance systems to monitor the spread of mpox. This is supported by a robust contact tracing process that helps us to effectively contain any imported cases found in the UK.

The latest information about UK cases of mpox is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-detects-first-case-of-clade-ib-mpox>

A full summary of the measures UKHSA is taking is summarised in the technical briefing, which is available at the following link:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e83b367f20ecc7ec3aa1db/mpox-technical-briefing-9.pdf>

This briefing will be reviewed and updated as more is understood about the disease.

UKHSA is engaged with international partners, including the World Health Organisation, European, US and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, ensuring we receive updates about international cases in a timely fashion.

■ Northwick Park Hospital: Domestic Visits

Barry Gardiner:

[18101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will visit the Griffin Institute at Northwick Park Hospital in Brent West constituency.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 10 December 2024]: Ministers regularly consider visits across the country to see the impact of their policy areas. Any plans to visit specific locations will be notified to the relevant Members of Parliament in advance.

■ Tobacco: Sales

Charlie Dewhirst:

[17990]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an estimate of the potential increase in incidents of (a) violent crime, (b) physical abuse and (c) verbal intimidation against shopkeepers as a result of a generational ban on tobacco sales.

Charlie Dewhirst:

[17991]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government will take steps to support the mental health of shopkeepers responsible with enforcing the implementation of a generational ban on tobacco sales.

Andrew Gwynne:

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death, disability, and ill health. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill will put us on track to a smoke-free United Kingdom, helping to reduce 80,000 preventable deaths, reduce the burden on the National Health Service, and reduce the burden on the taxpayer.

The impact assessment for the bill was published on 5 November and is considered 'fit for purpose' by the Regulatory Policy Committee. Whilst the impact assessment was unable to provide an estimate for the number of incidents of abuse towards retail workers due to a lack of evidence, we will consider approaches to assess this specific impact, including using publicly available data, when evaluating the policy.

To mitigate the risk that the smoke-free generation policy will increase the incidence of abuse towards retail workers, we are working closely with retailers and will continue to utilise the long lead-in time to best support retailers and the public in preparing for and implementing the changes to the legislation, which includes rolling out information campaigns for the public and retail workers.

We will not stand for violence and abuse against shopworkers. Everyone has a right to feel safe on the job. The Government will introduce a new offence of assaulting a retail worker to protect the hardworking and dedicated staff that work in stores.

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[17992\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the potential increase in illegal tobacco sales as a consequence of the implementation of a generational ban on tobacco sales.

Andrew Gwynne:

Evidence shows that when we have previously introduced targeted tobacco control measures, they have had a positive impact on tackling the problems of illicit tobacco. Consumption of illicit cigarettes has gone from 15 billion cigarettes in 2000/2001 to 1.5 billion cigarettes in 2022/2023. When the age of sale was increased from 16 to 18 years old in 2007, this created 1.3 million more people who were no longer able to be sold cigarettes, and who in theory would be in the market for illicit cigarettes. However, in practice, the number of illicit cigarettes consumed fell by 25%, from 10 billion in 2005/06 to 7.5 billion in 2007/08.

The Government is investing over £100 million over five years to boost HM Revenue and Customs and Border Force's enforcement capabilities to tackle illicit tobacco, supporting their Illicit Tobacco Strategy. In 2025/26 we will invest £30 million of new funding in total for enforcement agencies, including Trading Standards.

■ Vaccination: Waste Disposal

Tim Roca:

[\[17428\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of vaccine doses that are thrown away due to reaching their expiry date before they could be used.

Andrew Gwynne:

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) manages the central storage and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines for the United Kingdom's programme. In their published accounts for the financial year 2022/23, the figure was £143.280 million. The following table shows a summary of vaccine related losses for the latest published account:

DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Constructive loss as a result of COVID-19 vaccine expiry due to lower-than-expected use of vaccines compared to those planned for during purchasing.	£127,560,000
Constructive loss as a result of lower-than-expected consumption of flu vaccine resulting in the date expiry of this vaccine.	£15,720,000

DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Total	£143,280,000

Source: pages 124 to 125 of the UKHSA's Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23, which is available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65c0cf5763a23d000dc821bb/UKHSA-Annual-Report-2022_23-printable_file-2.pdf

Further information regarding vaccine expiry will be published as part of the UKHSA's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.

HOME OFFICE

■ Care Workers: Migrant Workers

Mike Amesbury:

[17869]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of giving health and care workers on Tier 2 visas a certificate of common sponsorship.

Seema Malhotra:

The Skilled Worker immigration route, which includes the Health and Care visa, relies on the sponsorship system to ensure that international recruits are coming to a guaranteed job and will not be abused in terms of salary and conditions.

A core tenet of the immigration system is the recognition that those who most directly benefit from bringing workers to the UK must play a vital role in maintaining the integrity of the system, including meeting all of the duties of sponsorship to ensure that the migrants they are bringing to the UK are genuinely intending to work.

There are over 105,000 licensed sponsors and workers can apply to change sponsors as they wish.

Last week we announced our commitment to minimising abuse of the visa and immigration system by unscrupulous employers. Further details can be found here: [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).

Allowing migrants into the UK without the protection of genuine guaranteed employment, and no access to public funds should that employment cease, would create a cohort of people who could become destitute. Open or unsponsored work permits could also lead to this state.

■ Devon and Cornwall Police: Public Appointments

Martin Wrigley:

[\[17654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will have discussions with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly on the adequacy of the system for appointing a Chief Constable for Devon and Cornwall Police.

Dame Diana Johnson:

It is for locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to make decisions around appointing, suspending, and removing chief constables.

The College of Policing updated the national Guidance for Appointing Chief Officers in February 2024 to ensure fair and appropriate processes are followed in the appointment of chief officers in England and Wales. The College also offer a range of services to help PCCs with the recruitment and appointment process including help to maximise the pool of potential candidates, support with delivering a process in line with the national guidance and to sit on the appointment panel as a senior police advisor.

■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes

Kirith Entwistle:

[\[18250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the support available to people who have left coercive relationships but continue to be subject to attempts at (a) financial and (b) other control by their ex-partners with whom they share parental responsibilities.

Jess Phillips:

Controlling and coercive behaviour is a particularly insidious form of domestic abuse, which can continue post-separation. It is often part of a wider pattern of abuse, including violent, sexual or economic abuse.

Since 5th April 2023, following the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and the amendment to Section 76 under the Serious Crime Act 2015, the controlling or coercive behaviour offence applies to ex-partners or family members who do not live together. This offers wider protection to victims who are experiencing abuse from an ex-partner they do not live with.

I recognise the devastating impact financial and economic abuse can have on victims. We continue to promote awareness of economic abuse to improve the public and private sector's response, particularly working with the specialist charity Surviving Economic Abuse to strengthen financial systems and support victims.

Proposals to reform the Child Maintenance Services (CMS) were published by the previous Government. This included removing Direct Pay and managing all CMS cases in one service to allow the CMS to tackle non-compliance faster, as well as exploring how victims and survivors of domestic abuse can be better supported. We are analysing the responses received, and the Government will publish a response in due course.

■ Immigration Controls: Airports

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[18334\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has made an estimate of the number of e-passports that do not work at UK airports; and what steps she is taking to help resolve that issue.

Seema Malhotra:

It has never been Government practice, for reasons of law enforcement, to comment on operational issues relating to border security and immigration controls. This includes offering commentary on the performance of border systems and of ePassport Gates data specifically.

However, the Hon Member will be pleased to know that the Home Office is making significant investment to improve the underlying technical infrastructure which performs border checks to identify individuals more precisely. This will reduce the number of individuals unable to use the ePassport Gates. These improvements have begun to be introduced, and further improvements are envisaged to identify persons of interest more precisely.

■ Immigration Controls: Biometrics

Rupert Lowe:

[\[17665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what biometric system failures there were at UK borders in 2023.

Seema Malhotra:

We are creating a streamlined, digital immigration system which will be quicker and more secure for the millions of people who pass through the border each year, and will enhance the security of the UK.

There are a number of biometric systems that are deployed at the border, primarily to ensure security, but also to facilitate a smooth flow of passengers. Examples include facial recognition performed at eGates, as well as finger-print checking by Border Force officers where a passenger is processed manually.

The majority of the checks are performed utilising the Immigration & Asylum Biometric System (IABS) and, during 2023, there were no critical incidents logged against that service.

There were a number of lower priority incidents, all of which were resolved within required timescales and appropriate business contingency measures were put in place to ensure that border security was not compromised. The specific contingency measures vary according to biometric system but, for example, where a Biometric Recording (BRS) machine is being used and it has lost connectivity to IABS, the data captured will be stored locally until it is reconnected to IABS.

■ Ketamine**Oliver Ryan:** [\[17659\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the classification of ketamine as a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing that classification.

Dame Diana Johnson:

No recent assessment has been made. Ketamine was moved from Class C to Class B in 2014, in accordance with advice provided by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD). The ACMD's recommendation was based on evidence of ketamine's potential for harm at that time. The Government continues to assess any emerging evidence of harm and keeps drugs controls under review. Any decisions about drug classification are made after seeking expert advice from the ACMD.

■ Manston Asylum Processing Centre: Biometrics**Rupert Lowe:** [\[17666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an estimate of the number of migrants processed at Manston Immigration Centre without biometric system support since February 2022.

Dame Angela Eagle:

All persons processed at Manston Reception Centre have their biometric data recorded as part of initial reception processes. This has been the case since Manston opened in April 2022. On occasion, there have been cases where the biometric data was captured in another detention setting after individuals have left Manston. Due to the large number of records that would have to be individually checked to confirm when and where biometrics were taken, the information being sought could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

■ Money Laundering: Cryptocurrencies**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** [\[18173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she plans to take to tackle money laundering through cryptocurrencies, in the context of the National Crime Agency's Operation Destabilise investigations.

Dan Jarvis:

Cryptoassets can be used illicitly or to launder the proceeds of crime. In April 2024, new powers came into force to search, seize and detain cryptoassets from criminal conduct or terrorist activity or cryptoassets that will be used in criminal conduct or terrorist activity.

Directed by the Economic Crime Plan 2 (and supported by an Economic Crime Levy funding) law enforcement are investing in improving both their capacity and capability in relation to the investigation of the criminal use of cryptoassets. This includes:

- Investing in specialist capability in the NCA and partner agencies, including the recruitment of an additional 475 Financial Crime investigators (280 currently in post) and developing improved crypto track and trace capability which will go live in December 2025.
- Funding public-private crypto collaboration teams in police forces and ROCUs through the Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme
- New training and upskilling that has been rolled out to improve law enforcement officers' understanding of cryptoassets, supported by the provision of specialist tooling (i.e. blockchain analytics tools).
- Building a new crypto-specific public/ private partnership within the existing Joint Money Laundering Taskforce structure in order to understand the threat and enable various joint initiatives (including around data sharing). Developing a multi-agency operational crypto cell to ensure that knowledge and abilities in investigating cryptoassets are pooled together, and that all available tools and powers are exploited efficiently.

Designing a system-wide strategy, with an accompanying roadmap of activities required to prevent and disrupt digital asset-enabled crime impacting the UK. The focus is on ensuring system co-ordination and collaboration, keeping the public / consumers safe, effectively disrupting criminals through robust enforcement and building global cooperation to effectively share information and improve consistency in regulatory standards.

■ National Crime Agency: Pay

Rachel Blake:

[\[18017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to reform pay policies at the National Crime Agency.

Dan Jarvis:

This Government is committed to supporting the National Crime Agency in the fight against serious and organised crime. A strong pay framework is vital to enable the Agency to deliver its role of disrupting and dismantling the most harmful organised crime groups in and impacting on the UK.

As announced alongside the National Crime Agency pay award on 29 July 2024, measures are underway to develop a set of comprehensive proposals for reform of the existing pay structure at the Agency. Once finalised, the government will seek to implement these proposals in a timely fashion.

■ Police and Crime Commissioners

Martin Wrigley:

[\[17655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of replacing Police and Crime Commissioners with police panels.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Police and Crime Commissioners play a vital local role acting as the voice of the public and victims in policing, holding Chief Constables to account and leading local partnerships to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour.

The government will continue to work with PCCs and Chief Constables to set clear expectations for policing on performance and standards, ensuring that our communities have an effective and efficient police service within their force area.

In her Written Ministerial Statement of 19 November 2024 (HCWS232), the Home Secretary announced her intention to present a White Paper to Parliament next year on reforms to deliver more effective and efficient policing, to rebuild public confidence and to deliver the Government's Safer Streets mission. This reform programme will be a collaborative endeavor with policing. Proposals will also consider how the PCC role can be strengthened, including an enhanced role to prevent crime.

■ Police Custody

Andy McDonald: [\[18124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of people aged (a) 14 to 17, (b) 18 to 25 and (c) 26 and older who enter police custody were screened for acquired brain injury in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Andy McDonald: [\[18125\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of people aged (a) 14 to 17, (b) 18 to 25 and (c) 26 and older who were screened for acquired brain injury when they entered police custody were found to have a brain injury in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Andy McDonald: [\[18126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance her Department issues on the steps the police should take when someone who enters police custody is found to have had an acquired brain injury.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Police custody officers should carry out an assessment of the risk and vulnerability of everyone in custody, on an individual basis. This assessment should take into account the person's behaviour, any signs of illness or injury, their communication, including information from all available sources and the circumstances and environment in which they were found.

In accordance with Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 Code C paragraph 9.5, the custody officer must make sure that a detainee receives appropriate clinical attention as soon as reasonably practicable if the person: appears to be suffering from physical illness, is injured, appears to be suffering from a mental disorder or appears to need clinical attention.

The Home Office does not issue guidance on custody healthcare. NHS England continue to support national policing by offering specialist support to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) custodial healthcare portfolio, which also includes the authoring and maintaining of the Police custodial healthcare service specification.

Data on the proportion of people in custody screened for or found to have an acquired brain injury is not held.

The Home Office collects and publishes data on detentions in police custody, including age and whether an adult was vulnerable.

The most recent data, for the year ending March 2023, is available here: [Other PACE powers, year ending March 2023 \(second edition\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

■ **Police: Anguilla**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[17590]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support policing in Anguilla.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Working in partnership with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the Home Office continues to provide a range of support to the Royal Anguilla Police Force (RAPF) and this has included development of Anguilla's crime scene investigation capabilities. Additional training on strengthening Anguilla's international ports of entry has also been provided to RAPF, Anguilla's Immigration Department and Customs Department.

■ **Police: Lincolnshire**

Sir John Hayes:

[17510]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the police allocation formula on (a) policing and (b) crime in Lincolnshire.

Dame Diana Johnson:

On 19th November, the Home Secretary announced that government funding for policing will increase by over half a billion pounds next year; 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.

■ Radicalism**Carla Denyer:** [\[17937\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Government's independent adviser on political violence and disruption has had meetings with representatives of (a) Leonardo, (b) Glencore, (c) Enwell Energy, (d) BP and (e) Centrica since being appointed to that role.

Dan Jarvis:

The work of the Independent Adviser on Political Violence and Disruption, including any engagement undertaken, is conducted independently from the Home Office.

■ Terrorism: Surveillance**Rupert Lowe:** [\[17988\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people are on the terror watchlist broken down by ideological motivation.

Dan Jarvis:

It is longstanding policy not to discuss either the specific information held on any security-related watchlist, the source of the information or how it is used. To do so would be counterproductive and harmful to the national security of the UK.

■ Undocumented Migrants**Rupert Lowe:** [\[17673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for what services related to irregular migration work is undertaken by (a) contracted companies and (b) staff of her Department.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The amount of work required to break down every element of activity related to irregular migration carried out by (a) Home Office officials, (b) other public bodies, and (c) external contractors could only be carried out for the purpose of answering this question at disproportionate cost.

James McMurdock: [\[17756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support local authorities that are facing challenges in managing people who have entered the UK illegally.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation and subsistence support whilst their application for asylum is being considered.

The Home Office is committed to working collaboratively with local authorities to effectively manage the impacts of accommodation sites and has developed asylum accommodation plans which consider a range of factors when allocating

accommodation, including the pressure on local services. The Home Office also provides financial assistance to Local Authorities through various grants to support the accommodation and dispersal of supported asylum seekers as well as providing a range of immigration status checking services to help them understand and manage individual circumstances.

■ **Undocumented Migrants: Hotels**

Rupert Lowe: [\[17671\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 2 December 2024 to Question 15393 on Undocumented Migrants: Hotels, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of publishing a breakdown of the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contracts.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Honourable Member to the answer I gave on 27 November to question UIN 15076.

■ **Undocumented Migrants: Housing**

Rupert Lowe: [\[17674\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the procurement references are of current contracts related to the housing of irregular migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Asylum seekers requiring accommodation under sections 4, 95 or 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 are accommodated under the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contracts (AASC). The procurement references for these contracts can be found on [Contracts Finder - GOV.UK](#).

■ **Undocumented Migrants: Public Opinion**

Rupert Lowe: [\[17667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 2 December to Question 15294 on Undocumented Migrants: Public Opinion, if she will publish a breakdown of (a) companies contracted by the Department for polling on irregular migration and (b) the cost to the public purse of this polling.

Rupert Lowe: [\[17668\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 2 December to Question 15294 on Undocumented Migrants: Public Opinion, if she will publish all polling results the Department holds on public opinion regarding irregular migration.

Dame Angela Eagle:

A polling contract is currently in place with Savanta Group Limited. This two-year contract commenced in August 2023 and is available online on Contracts Finder. Spend on irregular migration polling cannot be provided. The department polls on a

range of policy areas and spend on irregular migration cannot be disaggregated from total spend.

We have no plans to publish all polling results on irregular migration. However, the department does regularly publish a range of statistics, research and evaluation on migration, which is available on gov.uk.

■ **Undocumented Migrants: Temporary Accommodation**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[17672\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a consultation process with local residents before (a) a hotel and (b) other accommodation is used to house irregular migrants.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation and subsistence support whilst their application for asylum is being considered.

The Home Office liaises with statutory partners, including local authorities directly and via Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMP) on matters relating to its asylum accommodation footprint. SMPs are Local Government led partnerships funded by, but independent of, the Home Office, whose role is to coordinate and support delivery of national programmes in asylum and refugee schemes as well as agreed regional and devolved migration priorities.

■ **Visas: Overseas Visitors**

Nigel Farage:

[\[17645\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, which countries have had visitor visas reinstated since 5 July 2024.

Seema Malhotra:

Since 5 July 2024, the UK has reintroduced visitor visa requirements for nationals of Jordan on 10 September 2024 and for nationals of Colombia on 26 November 2024.

■ **Visas: Refugees**

Tony Vaughan:

[\[17919\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) commencing the move-on period for newly-recognised refugees only after access to their e-visa has been confirmed and (b) extending the move-on period to 56 days.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office has recently introduced a time limited pilot giving newly recognised refugees 56 days' notice to move on from asylum accommodation, in order to support local authorities as we seek to clear the asylum backlog and transition to eVisas.

■ Visas: Sponsorship

Alex Sobel:

[\[17864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to ensure sponsor licenses are processed within the service standards timeframes.

Seema Malhotra:

All fully completed, straightforward sponsor licence applications are currently being considered within the service standard timeframes.

Only a small number of applications remain outside the service level agreement in cases where further information is required to support their application or where we are awaiting the outcome of a visit to the applicant's premises.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Affordable Housing: Construction

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[17564\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many affordable homes were (a) started and (b) completed in England between 2010-11 and 2023-24.

Alex Norris:

The number of affordable housing starts and completions is available in live table 1000 here [Live tables on affordable housing supply - GOV.UK](#).

The number of completions is available since 1991-92. The department started publishing the number of starts in 2015-16. However, starts not reported via Homes England or the Greater London Authority only started being collected in 2016-17 and are collected on a voluntary basis. This means 2015-16 data does not include these data and subsequent years may still be under reporting it.

■ Agriculture: Land

Helen Whately:

[\[17576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will publish how many hectares of the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land are (a) protected, (b) under consideration for development and (c) approved for consent in each (i) local authority area and (ii) constituency.

Alex Norris:

The information requested is not held by the Department.

Helen Whately:

[\[17577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how she plans to report on the effectiveness of her safeguarding of the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land in line with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Helen Whately: [\[17578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to safeguard the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land.

Helen Whately: [\[17579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how the commitment to safeguard the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land is applied to planning decisions.

Alex Norris:

This Government places great importance on the value of our agricultural land. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out how the best and most versatile agricultural land should be reflected in planning policies and decisions. The Framework is clear that where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. How this is applied is a matter for local planning authorities in the first instance, through their plans and decisions.

■ **Combined Authorities: Accountability**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to increase scrutiny arrangements in mayoral combined authorities.

Jim McMahon:

There is an existing system of accountability and scrutiny arrangements for Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) to ensure that public spending is achieving value for money with an array of monitoring and reporting processes for MCAs. The government is committed to strengthening the accountability and scrutiny arrangements that will enable central government, mayors, combined authorities and combined county authorities to shift gear into a new mode of genuine partnership. This will be set out in the upcoming English Devolution White Paper.

■ **Construction: Regulation**

Mike Amesbury: [\[17594\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of having a single construction regulator.

Alex Norris:

It is important that government carefully considers the findings and recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 report in full. When the report was published in September, the Prime Minister indicated that the government will respond to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's 58 recommendations within six months and update Parliament annually on progress against every commitment made.

■ Devolution: Cornwall

Ben Maguire:

[\[17737\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of a devolved Cornish assembly.

Jim McMahon:

This Government was elected on a manifesto to widen and deepen devolution across the country. We believe that economic prosperity, productivity, and social cohesion are best achieved by devolving powers to local areas who best understand the needs of their communities. We will shortly be publishing a White Paper outlining an ambitious new framework for English devolution. The White Paper will present a clear and attractive offer, and we are eager to work with all areas, including Cornwall, to expand devolution across England. This follows our minded-to decision in September to progress a non-mayoral deal with Cornwall Council as a first step towards deeper devolution subject to local agreement.

Ben Maguire:

[\[17738\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of a devolution deal for Cornwall that does not involve any other regions or counties in the South West.

Jim McMahon:

This Government strongly believes that the benefits of devolution are best achieved through the establishment of combined authorities or combined county authorities over sensible economic geographies and supported by a mayor. This follows our minded-to decision in September to progress a non-mayoral deal with Cornwall Council as a first step towards deeper devolution subject to local agreement.

■ Domestic Abuse: Victim Support Schemes

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[17752\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to increase the funding for services supporting victims of domestic abuse.

Rushanara Ali:

On 28 November, the Government announced a funding increase of £30 million to the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant, bringing the total investment in this Grant to £160 million in 2025-26. This funding will enable local authorities in England to continue to invest in essential support within frontline safe accommodation services, ensuring victims of domestic abuse can access the support they need.

This is part of the Government's commitment to tackling domestic abuse, and our manifesto commitment to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, with improved support for victims.

Funding from April 2026 will be a matter for the Spending Review.

■ High Rise Flats: Insulation**Mike Amesbury:** [\[17592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what the penalties will be for landlords who do not follow the Remediation Acceleration Plan.

Alex Norris:

There must be consequences for inaction. The Government will return with proposals in due course.

■ Homelessness: Temporary Accommodation**Neil Duncan-Jordan:** [\[17744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to require building and health and safety standards in (a) emergency and (b) temporary accommodation provided to homeless families.

Rushanara Ali:

All tenants deserve a safe and decent home, and the Government is working to improving standards across all sectors with a commitment to introduce a new Decent Homes Standard.

Local authorities must ensure temporary accommodation is suitable and should keep the suitability of accommodation under review. Housing authorities should as a minimum ensure that all temporary accommodation is free of Category 1 hazards as identified by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). To enable effective enforcement, we have given local authorities strong powers, including financial penalties of up to £30,000, extending rent repayment orders and introducing banning orders for the most serious and prolific offenders.

The Renters' Rights Bill will drive significant improvements to conditions in the private rented sector. Ensuring landlords adhere to a legally binding Decent Homes Standard and extending 'Awaab's Law' to private landlords will significantly reduce the number of poor-quality privately rented homes and empower tenants to raise concerns about damp, dangerous and cold homes.

Through the Bill, the Government has introduced powers to apply the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector, which includes new powers to bring temporary accommodation into scope of the DHS. This will ensure that safe, secure housing is the standard people can expect in temporary accommodation.

The Renters' Rights Bill will also make it possible to apply Awaab's Law to temporary accommodation occupied under licence through regulations. We will consult in due course on how best to apply Awaab's Law to such accommodation occupied under licence to make sure we strike the right balance by providing protections to residents while maintaining ambitions on supply.

■ Housing: Ownership

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17553\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the impact of the Housing (Right to Buy) (Limits on Discount) (England) Order 2024 on levels of home ownership.

Alex Norris:

The Government's review of Right to Buy discounts was published alongside the Budget on 30th October, and new maximum cash discounts came into force via the Housing (Right to Buy) (Limits on Discount) (England) Order 2024 on 21 November. As set out in the [review](#), our modelling suggests a long-run average of c. 1,700 sales annually under the new maximum discounts.

■ Housing: Private Sector

Mike Amesbury: [\[17601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a housing ombudsman service for the private sector.

Alex Norris:

The Renters' Rights Bill, currently before Parliament, will introduce a new Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman service to provide quick, fair, impartial and binding resolutions for tenants' complaints about their landlord. This will bring tenant-landlord complaint resolution on par with established redress practices in social housing and across the property agent sector.

■ Housing: Watchet

Rachel Gilmour: [\[17692\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies of the occupancy rate for houses in Watchet in Tiverton and Minehead constituency.

Alex Norris:

Local authorities have strong powers and incentives to tackle empty homes. They have the discretionary powers to charge additional council tax on properties which have been left unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for one or more years. The maximum premium that a council can apply increases, depending on the length of time that the property has been empty for, with a premium of up to 300% on homes left empty for over ten years.

Local authorities can also use powers to take over the management of long-term empty homes to bring them back into use in the private rented sector. Local authorities can apply for an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) when a property has been empty for more than two years, subject to the production of evidence that the property has been causing a nuisance to the community and

evidence of community support for their proposal. More information can be found [here](#).

■ Land: Valuation

Mr Lee Dillon: [\[18042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing measures to reduce the hope value of land.

Alex Norris:

The government recently brought into force regulations that provide for the removal of 'hope value' from the assessment of compensation in compulsory purchase cases, where there is justification in the public interest. Guidance and a fact sheet on the measures was published on 3 October 2024 and can be found [here](#).

We have made clear our intention to further reform the compulsory purchase process and land compensation rules to enable more effective land assembly that will speed-up and lower the costs of the delivery of housing and critical infrastructure in the public interest. The reforms will be subject to consultation which will be published shortly.

■ Local Government Finance

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17561\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to publish the provisional local government finance settlement for financial year 2025-26.

Jim McMahon:

The Government will publish the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December where we will consult on allocations for 2025-26, alongside launching a consultation on the objectives and principles of local government funding reform.

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what formula her Department plans to use to determine (a) which local authorities will receive funding from the Recovery Grant and (b) the amount of such funding allocated to each local authority.

Jim McMahon:

The Recovery Grant, worth £600 million, will be distributed using a formula that is based on deprivation and council tax base, using the most recently available public data. The grant will go to places where, weighted by population, deprivation outweighs council tax raising ability. The grant is intended to be highly targeted, meaning that not all authorities will receive an allocation.

We will set out more detail on the formula and consult on allocations at the provisional Settlement in December.

■ Local Government Finance: Bedfordshire

Callum Anderson:

[\[17681\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what estimate she has made of the change in (a) core spending power and (b) settlement funding for (i) Aylesbury Vale District Council in each financial year between 2010-11 and 2019-20, (ii) Buckinghamshire County Council in each financial year between 2010-11 and 2019-20 and (iii) Buckinghamshire Council in each financial year since 2020-21.

Jim McMahon:

Detailed information on core spending power and settlement funding for Aylesbury Vale District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council and Buckinghamshire Council for each year from 2015/16 to 2020/21 can be viewed [here](#).

Due to changes in the function and financing of local government, comparable data on Core Spending Power is not available prior to 2015/16.

■ Local Government Services: Rural Areas

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[17560\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Statement of 28 November 2024 on Local Government Finance, HCWS265, whether her Department has carried out an equality impact assessment on repurposing the Rural Services Delivery Grant.

Jim McMahon:

The Government took into consideration the Public Sector Equality Duty when making decisions regarding the Rural Services Delivery Grant.

This Government is absolutely committed to tackling the issues that matter to rural communities. Places with a significant rural population will on average receive around a 5% increase in their Core Spending Power next year, which is a real terms increase. No council will see a reduction – and new funding will be available to rural areas in 2025-26 through guaranteed EPR payments.

The Government will set out more detail on all measures set out at the provisional Settlement in December where we will consult on allocations for 2025-26, alongside launching a consultation on the objectives and principles of local government funding reform. The Settlement consultation will request views on the approach to changing how we deliver grant funding through the Settlement, and on equalities impacts. The Government welcomes views of rural councils in response to each of these consultations.

■ Local Government: Employers' Contributions

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[17552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential impact the planned increase in employer National Insurance contributions on external services commissioned by local government.

Jim McMahon:

The Government has committed to provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional employer NICs costs. This applies to those directly employed by the public sector, including local government. We will set out further details at the provisional Settlement in December.

Local Government: Remote Working**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[17557\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings, published on 24 October 2024, what assessment she has made of the (a) effectiveness of in-person debate and (b) potential impact of in-person debate on decision making.

Jim McMahon:

The attendance of elected members at local authority meetings is a core part of the democratic process at the local level, and is integral to members carrying out their functions effectively. At the same time, the Government recognises that there are circumstances in which it may not always be possible for members to attend meetings in person. We will consider all responses to the consultation before deciding on a course of action.

Local Plans**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[17556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what proportion of Local Plans have been withdrawn by local authorities in 2024 following advice from the Planning Inspectorate; and what assessment she has made of the financial cost incurred on those local authorities to commence a second Regulation 19 hearing in accordance with the Town & Country (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Alex Norris:

As of the end of November 2024, 2 (4.4%) of the 45 plans that have been examined by the Planning Inspectorate this year have been withdrawn following advice from the Planning Inspectorate. A third plan was recommended for withdrawal but the authority declined asking instead for a final report which found the plan unsound thus ending the examination.

An assessment of the financial costs of withdrawal has not been made, the cost to a local authority bringing forward a new plan after withdrawal will depend on their individual circumstances.

Local Plans must be fit for purpose as the primary basis for identifying what development is needed in an area. It is the responsibility of local authorities to prepare and submit a plan that is capable of being found sound at examination.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17834\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on how many occasions she has visited the QEII Centre since the general election; and if she will visit the GB News studio in the centre.

Alex Norris:

The Deputy Prime Minister has not visited the GB News Centre in the QEII Centre. As with all media interviews, availability and logistics for interview location are subject to busy ministerial diaries. Other MHCLG Ministers have been interviewed at the GB News studios in QEII where timing and logistics have allowed.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Secondment

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17559\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many local authority officers are seconded to her Department.

Jim McMahon:

Fewer than or equal to five staff are currently engaged by this department in a secondment capacity from a local authority.

■ Parking: Regulation

Martin Wrigley: [\[17651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing an independent parking regulator.

Alex Norris:

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

The Government is determined to drive up standards in the private parking industry and is currently reviewing all options on how to achieve this.

■ Planning

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[17568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what her Department's timetable is for responding to the National Planning Policy Framework consultation that ended on 24 September 2024.

Alex Norris:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to Question UIN [7852](#) on 14 October 2024.

■ Planning: Appeals**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[17555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many and what proportion of appeal hearings considered by the Planning Inspectorate were conducted virtually in 2024.

Alex Norris:

The Planning Inspectorate undertakes public hearings and inquiries across all its casework services. Most take place in person, but some are held wholly or partly virtually.

Reliable data on the number and proportion of virtually held events is not available.

■ Planning: Derelict Land**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[17522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, updated 24 September 2024, whether she plans to use architects to help utilise complex brownfield sites for development.

Alex Norris:

I refer the hon member to the answer to Question UIN [16502](#) on 5 December 2024.

■ Planning: Reform**Andrew Rosindell:** [\[17521\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's consultation entitled Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, updated 24 September 2024, whether she plans to take steps to ensure that design codes reflect local circumstances.

Alex Norris:

The government's recent consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear the importance of achieving well-designed places and how this can be achieved holistically through local design policies, design codes and guidance.

A clear framework exists through policy and guidance to support local planning authorities deliver well-designed places and to enable them to work together with the communities they serve to ensure the development of new homes responds to the positive and distinctive context and characteristics of an area. This can be through policies in the local plan, masterplans, guidance and design codes that are locally led.

Our continued commitment to well-designed homes and places is further supported through proposed updates to the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code in Spring 2025.

■ Rehabilitation and Victim Support Schemes: Torbay

Steve Darling:

[\[17634\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how much base funding she plans to provide for (a) domestic abuse and sexual violence and (b) drugs and alcohol services in Torbay constituency.

Rushanara Ali:

In 2024/25, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) allocated Torbay, as a Tier One authority, £321,538 to commission support for victims of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation locally.

On 28 November, the Government announced a £30 million increase to the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant, bringing the total investment to £160 million in 2025-26. This funding will enable all local authorities in England to continue investing in essential support within frontline safe accommodation services, ensuring victims of domestic abuse can access the support they need. Individual allocations to local authorities will be published shortly.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) provides ringfenced funding to Police and Crime Commissioners for community-based support to victims of crime, including victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly received £3,752,000 for 2024-25.

Despite the challenging financial environment, MoJ ministers have decided to protect victims spending in the department by maintaining 2024-25 funding levels for sexual violence and domestic abuse support next year. This means that for 2025-26, the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund (RASASF) grant will be maintained at its current level (£21 million for 25-26). Recipients of the RASASF in Devon and Cornwall received a combined total of £782,500 for 2024-25.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is continuing to invest in improvements to local drug and alcohol treatment services. In addition to the Public Health Grant, DHSC allocated local authorities £267 million in 2024-25 to improve the quality and capacity of drug and alcohol treatment and recovery. An additional £105 million from DHSC, MHCLG and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is improving treatment pathways and recovery, housing and employment outcomes for people affected by drug and alcohol use. As part of this, in 2024/25 Torbay received £798,783 through the Supplemental Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant and £40,085 through the Inpatient Detoxification Grant. Now that the autumn budget has concluded, DHSC is working to announce future funding allocations for drug and alcohol treatment and recovery systems.

Funding from April 2026 will be a matter for Phase Two of the Spending Review.

■ Storms: Chippenham**Sarah Gibson:** [\[18288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has determined the appropriateness of central recovery support following flooding in Chippenham after Storm Berk.

Alex Norris:

I refer the hon Member to my answer to Question UIN [18286](#) on 10 December 2024.

■ Supported Housing: Advisory Services**Rachel Gilmour:** [\[17693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to expedite the establishment of the Supported Housing Advisory Panel.

Rushanara Ali:

The Government remains committed to implementing the measures in the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023, including appointing members to a Supported Housing Advisory Panel.

The recruitment of Panel members has resumed and applications closed on 9 December. We will appoint the panel as soon as possible.

JUSTICE**■ Domestic Violence: Older People****Jim Shannon:** [\[17535\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether she plans to review legal protections around the (a) abuse and (b) neglect of older people.

Alex Davies-Jones:

Any form of elder abuse or neglect is unacceptable. Whilst the Government has no immediate plans to conduct a specific review of the range of legal protections already in place around the abuse and neglect of older people, it continues to engage with partners about this serious issue.

In the meantime, there are already robust safeguards in place. Local authorities have a statutory duty to investigate safeguarding concerns under the Care Act 2014. The statutory guidance of the Care Act 2014 makes it clear that local authorities must ensure that the services they commission are safe, effective and of high quality. Since April 2023, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have had a duty to assess local authorities' delivery of their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2024.

The first formal assessment of local authorities began in December 2023, shortly after the CQC concluded its pilot assessments in November. The CQC has published its first three local authority ratings and reports and is rolling out assessments to all 153 local authorities in England.

■ Prison Accommodation

Fred Thomas:

[\[18273\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what is the net change in prison places since 5 July 2024.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The capacity of the prison estate is published weekly and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-figures-2024>.

■ Social Workers: Powers of Entry

Jim Shannon:

[\[17536\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on reviewing powers of entry for social workers.

Alex Davies-Jones:

The Ministry of Justice has no remit for powers of entry for social workers. Therefore, there have been no discussions with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the issue. Any review of such powers would be a matter for the Department of Health and Social Care.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

■ Environment Protection

Ellie Chowns:

[\[18013\]](#)

To ask the Leader of the House, when she plans to update the Cabinet Office Guide to Making Legislation to provide guidance on the environmental principles duty in section 19(1) of the Environment Act 2021.

Lucy Powell:

The Guide to Making Legislation will be updated shortly and will include references to environmental principles. Leading up to the commencement of the statutory duties contained within the Environment Act 2021, guidance was circulated to all Whitehall departments. This guidance related to both sections 19 and 20 of that Act.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Consumer Goods: Safety

Sorcha Eastwood:

[\[18258\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on the potential impact of the General Product Safety Regulations 2023 on the ability of consumers in Northern Ireland to buy goods from Great Britain.

Hilary Benn:

The updated General Product Safety Regulations largely formalises how businesses are already operating in the UK and the measures are therefore likely to have limited impact in practice. Where businesses need to make changes, we expect that they will be adapting anyway to be compliant with the new Regulation to continue trading with the EU.

The Department for Business and Trade's Office for Product Safety & Standards has issued guidance on the application of the General Product Safety Regulation in Northern Ireland to support businesses.

This will be kept under review and DBT will continue to engage businesses directly to ensure the government is supporting them to trade freely across the whole of the UK. My department continues to have regular engagement with DBT on this new Regulation.

Sorcha Eastwood:[\[18259\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment he has made of the impact of the General Product Safety Regulations on the ability of consumers in Northern Ireland to buy goods from Great Britain.

Hilary Benn:

The updated General Product Safety Regulations largely formalises how businesses are already operating in the UK and the measures are therefore likely to have limited impact in practice. Where businesses need to make changes, we expect that they will be adapting anyway to be compliant with the new Regulation to continue trading with the EU.

The Business department has issued guidance in this area ([General product safety regulations: Northern Ireland - GOV.UK](#)), and we will keep this under review. The government will continue to engage businesses directly to ensure we are supporting them to trade freely across the whole of the UK.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ Broadband and Mobile Phones: Standards****Blake Stephenson:**[\[17332\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to support people in areas of poor (a) broadband and (b) mobile phone signal during the switchover to digital alternatives to landlines.

Chris Bryant:

For current landline-only customers it will be possible to order a VoIP landline without purchasing a general internet connection. Customers will only be offered VoIP if they live in an area with sufficient broadband connectivity.

In areas with insufficient mobile coverage to rely on their mobile as a back-up to VoIP, communication providers are required to comply with Ofcom regulations and provide a battery back-up solution. This ensures customers have a minimum of 1 hour access to emergency services. Major communication providers have signed up to the PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) charter and the non-voluntary migrations checklist published by the Department on 19 November 2024.

■ Food: Disease Control

Ben Obese-Jecty: [\[17644\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has made a recent assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals on regulating the use of AI in the context of food biosecurity.

Feryal Clark:

AI is a general-purpose technology, with a wide array of applications. The vast majority of AI systems should be regulated at the point of use, and the UK's existing expert regulators are best placed to do this.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology engages regularly across government departments to understand how they are considering AI-related policy issues within their remit.

■ Food: Research

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[17249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with businesses on the UK's approach to research into food biosecurity since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[17250\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with universities on the UK's approach to research into food biosecurity since July 2024.

Feryal Clark:

The Department has regular discussions with businesses and universities on a range of issues.

■ Research: Investment

George Freeman: [\[17526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department plans to measure the private sector investment in the research and development economy by (a) sector, (b) cluster and (c) departmental spend.

Feryal Clark:

The Office for National Statistics routinely publishes official statistics on Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD), Business Expenditure on R&D (BERD), and Research

and development expenditure by the UK government. These publications include various levels of breakdowns, including by sector and government department.

The Innovation Clusters Map published by DSIT in 2024 presents firm-level innovation activity across the UK, including public and private investment, allowing users to explore clusters to better understand the UK's innovation ecosystem.

TRANSPORT

■ Blue Badge Scheme: Children

Helen Maguire: [\[18837\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of revising the eligibility criteria for the Blue Badge scheme to include children under three requiring bulky mobility aids.

Lilian Greenwood:

There are already specific criteria in place to assess the need for a Blue Badge for children under three years old who require the use of bulky mobility aids. The Department has no plans to amend the current eligibility criteria.

■ Bus Services

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18621\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when she plans to bring forward a Buses Bill.

Simon Lightwood:

The Buses Bill will be introduced shortly.

■ Bus Services: Lincolnshire

Sir John Hayes: [\[18485\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of changes to the level of the bus fare cap on public transport use in Lincolnshire.

Simon Lightwood:

In the Budget on 30 October, the government confirmed it will invest over £150 million to introduce a new £3 cap on single bus fares in England outside London from 1 January until 31 December 2025. Under the plans of the previous administration, the current £2 cap on bus fares had been due to expire on 31 December 2024, and prior to the Budget, there was no further funding available to maintain the cap beyond this point.

The published interim evaluation of the £2 fare cap showed that patronage continued to recover following the COVID 19 pandemic and early evidence from the first two months of the scheme suggested the £2 fare cap may be playing a role in this recovery. The final evaluation of the £2 fare cap, including a further assessment of its impact on patronage will be published in due course.

■ Dangerous Driving: Fines

Alex Ballinger:

[\[18465\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to enforce stricter penalties for (a) unsafe driving and (b) speeding.

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.

■ Great Western Railway: Standards

Steve Darling:

[\[17633\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress her Department has made on helping to improve Great Western Railway services on Sundays.

Simon Lightwood:

The recent performance of Great Western Railway (GWR) services on Sundays has not been good enough. Whilst many factors impact performance the recent increase in cancellations has been driven by the availability of traincrew. Officials are actively working with GWR and the wider industry to improve performance on Sundays.

TREASURY

■ Dental Services: Employers' Contributions

Jess Brown-Fuller:

[\[17719\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her Department's policy paper, Changes to the Class 1 National Insurance Contributions Secondary Threshold, the Secondary Class 1 National Insurance contributions rate, and the Employment Allowance from 6 April 2025, published on 13 November 2024, if she will make an estimate of the (a) revenue that will accrue to the Exchequer from businesses in the dentistry sector as a result of the proposed increased rate of employer national insurance contributions and (b) average cost per business (i) nationally and (ii) by constituency of that increase in the next five financial years.

Jess Brown-Fuller:

[\[17760\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her Department's policy paper, titled Changes to the Class 1 National Insurance Contributions Secondary Threshold, the Secondary Class 1 National Insurance contributions rate, and the Employment Allowance from 6 April 2025, published on 13 November 2024, if she will make an estimate of the number of businesses in the dentistry sector that will pay the proposed increase in the rate of employer national insurance contributions (a) nationally and (b) by constituency in the next financial year.

James Murray:

The latest forecasts for tax revenues were published alongside the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) October Economic and Fiscal Outlook. These forecasts are based on economic determinants, including wage growth and employment levels. The OBR do not forecast NICs receipts at a sector level. Detailed tax receipts forecasts can be found here: [Economic and fiscal outlook – October 2024 - Office for Budget Responsibility](#).

The government will provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional employer National Insurance Contributions, i.e. central government, public corporations and local government. Dentists are independent contractors and therefore will not be exempt from these changes.

The government has taken tough decisions to fix the foundations so that increased funding for the NHS in England could be announced at the Budget. Resource spending for the Department of Health and Social Care is set to increase by £22.6 billion in 2025-26 compared to 2023-24 outturn, providing a real-terms growth rate of 4% for the NHS, the largest since before 2010 excluding Covid-19 years. This includes funding to support the NHS to deliver the first step of an extra two million NHS operations, scans, and appointments a year in England.

Primary care providers – general practice, dentistry, pharmacy and eye care – are valued independent contractors who provide nearly £20bn worth of NHS services. Every year we consult with each sector both about what services they provide, and the money providers are entitled to in return under their contract.

DHSC will confirm funding for dentistry for 2025/26 as part of the usual contract processes later in the year, including through consultation with the sector.

Government keeps all taxes under review.

■ Digital Assets: Foreign Investment in UK**Mark Garnier:****[17793]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps the Government is taking to promote the UK as a place for international investment in digital assets.

Tulip Siddiq:

The government is taking a range of steps to promote digital asset adoption. This includes initiatives such as the recently announced Digital Gilt Instrument, or DIGIT, and the new Digital Securities Sandbox, which opened in September.

Innovation and technology is also one of our five core policy pillars in our Financial Services Growth and Competitiveness strategy, which forms part of the government's wider industrial strategy.

■ Digital Assets: Regulation

Mark Garnier:

[\[17794\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department has had discussions with the Financial Conduct Authority on regulation of digital assets.

Tulip Siddiq:

HM Treasury works closely with the regulators, including the Financial Conduct Authority, on digital assets regulation. This includes the recent opening of the Digital Securities Sandbox, legislated for by HM Treasury and jointly operated by the Bank of England and the Financial Conduct Authority, and the forthcoming regulatory regime for cryptoassets.

■ Disability: Taxation

Susan Murray:

[\[17663\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will review the criteria for vehicle tax exemptions for disabled individuals (a) over the state pension age and (b) in receipt of Attendance Allowance.

James Murray:

The Government is committed to supporting disabled people and is determined that support should be focused on people who need it most. The aim of existing Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) exemptions for recipients of some disability benefits is to provide additional help for people who become disabled early, or relatively early, in life and as a result experience economic disadvantage. These allowances are therefore only available to people who become disabled before State Pension age.

For individuals who develop a disability after State Pension age, Attendance Allowance (AA) is a non-means-tested benefit which provides targeted help with the extra costs of disability and helps them maintain their independence. Unlike Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment, AA does not have a mobility component and is intended to cover the need for care or supervision an individual requires as a result of their disability rather than specific mobility needs. Individuals can however choose to use their AA to fund mobility aids.

While we have no current plans to reform the VED exemptions for recipients of some disability benefits, the Government keeps all taxes under review as part of the policy making process, and the Chancellor makes decisions at fiscal events in the context of the public finances.

■ Hospitality Industry and Leisure: Business Rates

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[17567\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 2.43 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, whether she has made an estimate of the average difference in the business rate bill of a hereditament eligible for

retail, hospitality and leisure business rate relief in the 2025-26 financial year, relative to the 2024-25 financial year.

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 has 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 2025-26.

At Budget, the Government also announced that from 2026-27, it intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for RHL properties, with rateable values below £500,000. 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 properties with rateable values of £500,000 or more, 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.

■ **Ministers: Official Cars**

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[17676\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has been provided use of a vehicle for official Ministerial travel from outside the Government Car Service.

James Murray:

We do not comment on the specific arrangements in place for the Chancellor because of security.

■ **Personal Care Services: Regulation**

Dr Simon Opher:

[\[18418\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing regulations to enhance financial transparency within the hairdressing industry.

Tulip Siddiq:

Financial transparency is key to ensuring cash-based businesses meet their legal obligations, such as registering with HMRC and paying taxes promptly.

However, these benefits must be balanced against the burdens on business created by new regulation.

While cash-based businesses such as hairdressers are not regulated for money laundering purposes, they will regularly interact with regulated financial businesses,

such as banks. These regulated entities are required to report any suspicious financial activity by their customers.

WALES

■ Council Tax: Wales

Robbie Moore:

[\[901701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on changes to Council Tax in Wales.

Jo Stevens:

Council Tax in Wales is a devolved matter and is the responsibility of the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government confirmed plans for reform earlier this year including a property revaluation exercise to bring the system up to date, and a redesign of the tax bands to make the system fairer. No major changes to council tax will be made in this Senedd term.

■ Public Expenditure: Wales

Ann Davies:

[\[901703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the Barnett formula for Wales.

Dame Nia Griffith:

The Welsh Government's budget is increasing in real terms and is the largest settlement since devolution. This includes **£1.7 billion** through the Barnett formula to spend on public services like the NHS, which I noted didn't feature in the Honourable Member's pre budget 'demands'.

The outcome of the formula is actually that the Welsh Government receive **20%** more per person than equivalent UK Government spending in other parts of the UK.

■ Senedd Cymru

Sir Ashley Fox:

[\[901702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether she has had discussions with the Welsh Government on the proposed increase in the number of Senedd members.

Jo Stevens:

I have had no discussions with the Welsh Government on this matter in my capacity as Secretary of State, as the Bill became law prior to the General Election.

As would be expected, this government respects devolution and the powers of the Senedd to determine its representation and elections.

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Connect to Work and Universal Support**

Helen Whately: [\[17572\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the differences are between the (a) Connect to Work and (b) Universal support schemes.

Alison McGovern:

Connect to Work will use the funding that was initially reserved for the Universal Support Programme. There are aspects of Connect to Work that have similarities with that previously announced programme, such as it being an evidence-based Supported Employment programme targeted at economically inactive disabled people, those with health conditions and those with complex barriers to employment. This is to help ensure that we keep the positive impacts that the Office for Budget Responsibility scored for Universal Support. Connect to Work, however, has been co-designed with Local Authorities and has flexibility to meet local needs at its core.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Training

Melanie Ward: [\[18289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to ensure staff receive training on the Scottish benefits system.

Andrew Western:

DWP learning reflects the services provided by Social Security Scotland with references and signposting to operational instructions.

■ Employment Schemes: Finance

Helen Whately: [\[17573\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of the £240 million funding allocated to her Department in the Autumn Budget 2024 for trialling new ways of getting people back into work on savings to the public purse in each of the next five years.

Alison McGovern:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to Question [17010](#) on 5th December 2024, for the details of how we have allocated the £240 million funding across the White Paper measures.

We are working with trailblazers to create their local plans and we are developing an evaluation strategy to measure impacts, including savings to ensure we make the most effective interventions to get Britain working.

■ Jobcentres and Universal Credit: Telephone Services**Rupert Lowe:****[17669]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 2 December 2024 to Question 15704 on Jobcentres and Universal Credit: Telephone Services, what the costs were to her Department of translation and interpretation for each language code since 2021.

Alison McGovern:

Further to our previous answer to Question 15704, we are unable to provide a full response to this follow up question. Following consultation with the supplier we consider the release of the specific costing information requested would prejudice commercial interests.

■ Pension Credit**Helen Whately:****[18163]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people have made a (a) successful and (b) unsuccessful application for Pension Credit in each Parliamentary constituency since 1 April 2024; and how many people are awaiting a decision on their claim in each constituency.

Emma Reynolds:

Statistics on Pension Credit application volumes were published on 28 November 2024. This includes numbers of applications that were awarded and not awarded, up to 17 November 2024. [Pension Credit applications and awards: November 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

We do not currently hold this information at constituency level.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ UK Food Security Report 2024

Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Daniel Zeichner): [\[HCWS297\]](#)

Later today we intend to lay the next edition of the UK Food Security Report (UKFSR) in Parliament, as required by the Agriculture Act 2020.

The UKFSR sets out an analysis of statistics relating to food security, serving as an evidence base to inform future Government policy and public understanding.

This 2024 report will reflect improvements in the evidence base following consultation with a range of experts and stakeholders from across the food system.

Food security is national security. Food security is also complex and exposed to many different variables globally and domestically such as the weather, markets and trade. It is therefore vital that the government monitors food security trends and even more so in a world facing increasing challenges from geopolitics and climate change.

The Government has confirmed to businesses and industry groups from across the food sector that work is underway to develop an ambitious new food strategy. The Government will be considering the UKFSR's findings to inform this work.

■ Conclusion of annual negotiations for 2025 fishing opportunities

Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Daniel Zeichner): [\[HCWS296\]](#)

The UK has reached agreement with the EU and Norway on catch opportunities for 2025 through the UK-EU-Norway trilateral and UK-EU bilateral negotiations. Across these negotiations, the UK secured agreement on over 80 Total Allowable Catches (TACs), providing access to £660 million of UK fishing opportunities. Alongside the Coastal State negotiations on stocks including mackerel, this brings the total UK fishing opportunities secured for 2025 to 720,000 tonnes, worth an estimated £890 million based on provisional landing prices.

Further, since leaving the EU, the UK has a larger share of many of the Total Allowable Catches (TACs) set at these negotiations. It is estimated that the UK might have received around 600,000 tonnes of fishing opportunities if we were still an EU member state, in comparison to the 720,000 tonnes actually received. That's an estimated increase of 120,000 tonnes of fishing opportunities for the UK fleet in 2025.

In these negotiations the UK Government worked closely with the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive to secure outcomes that deliver on all our domestic and international obligations, improving the sustainable management of our fish stocks for the long term in support of the whole of the of the UK fishing industry.

UK-EU Agreement

The UK has secured fishing opportunities of 150,000 tonnes, worth around £360 million based on historic landing prices, through agreement on around 70 TACs as well as agreement on arrangements for non-quota stocks. This is an increase of around 10,000 tonnes compared to 2024 largely driven by increasing scientific advice on sustainable catch levels for Northern Shelf anglerfish.

An initial estimate suggests that slightly fewer UK-EU TACs are set to align with scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) compared to last year, due to a challenging advice picture for a number of stocks. The Government will publish early in 2025 a full assessment of the number of TACs set consistent with ICES advice across all annual negotiations.

The UK and EU also made commitments to work together through the Specialised Committee for Fisheries to address the management challenges of certain fisheries. This includes reviewing the effectiveness of measures to protect spurdog and continuing to progress work on technical measures to support the recovery of depleted stocks in the Celtic and Irish Seas. The UK and EU also agreed to continue to work together through the SCF to support ICES in improving the science base for a number of stocks, including pollack in ICES area 6 and 7 (which will be benchmarked by ICES in early 2025) and sole 7hjk.

For non-quota stocks (NQS), the UK and the EU agreed a roll-over of access arrangements for 2025 to ensure continued access to fish NQS in EU waters. UK fleet landings for these stocks are historically worth around £30 million a year. We also agreed to roll-over existing joint management measures and increase within ICES advice some catch limits for seabass, and a roll-over of access arrangements for spurdog in the North Sea and albacore tuna.

UK-EU-Norway Trilateral Negotiations

The UK has also reached agreement with Norway and the EU on catch limits for 2025 for six jointly managed North Sea stocks, giving the UK fishing fleet access to opportunities worth over £300 million, based on historic landing prices.

The Parties agreed TACs for six stocks. Four of the six stocks were set in line with, or below, independent scientific advice from ICES. For North Sea herring, parties aimed to set TACs in line with advice. However, the current management structure, to which the UK has long objected, means we cannot consider outcomes to be in line with headline advice. Finally, for Northern Shelf cod, the parties acknowledged the current advice structure means the sub-stock located in the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel in quarter one brings down the advised catch limits for sub-stocks further North and therefore brings significant challenges for the whitefish sector in the North Sea. The parties therefore agreed an approach to set the TAC using part of the headline advice in combination with an alternative catch scenario provided by ICES. This approach is forecasted to lead to biomass increases across all three of the stock's sub-stocks and secures fishing opportunities that recognise the economic importance of cod in the mixed fishery.

The Parties renewed their commitment to deliver Long-Term Management Plans (LTMP) for their shared stocks and agreed a request to ICES to advise on an LTMP for saithe. The Parties also noted their commitment to start discussions on a new management model for herring in 2025, a significant priority for the UK. That model should also incorporate the newly-developed LTMP. The Parties also agreed to start discussions in 2025 about moving the management of Northern Shelf anglerfish (monkfish) to a joint basis, and they further committed to continue to progress their joint work on the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance of their shared stocks.

Multilateral coastal States negotiations

The UK has agreed TACs at the level advised by ICES on the three widely-distributed stocks we share with other coastal States in the North-East Atlantic: mackerel, blue whiting and Norwegian spring-spawning/Atlanto-Scandian herring. The opportunities will be worth an estimated £240 million to the UK fleet in 2025, based on historical prices. The UK will also have additional mackerel quota in 2025 as part of the multi-year deals with Norway and Faroes agreed last year.

Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs)

The UK has continued to support the sustainable management of widely distributed and highly migratory stocks via Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) of which it is a member. RFMO negotiations this year have resulted in the agreement of a wide range of stock-related measures, conservation measures and measures to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) activities. These negotiations have also delivered around 2000t of fishing opportunities for the UK, as well as a new sharing arrangement for the reopened Canadian Northern cod fishery.

UK-Norway and UK-Faroe Islands bilateral negotiations

Bilateral negotiations between the UK and Norway and the UK and the Faroe Islands on access arrangements and exchanges of fishing opportunities are ongoing.

■ **Farming Schemes**

Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Daniel Zeichner): [\[HCWS298\]](#)

I have today confirmed this Government has injected more than £343 million into the rural economy in the first week of December, benefiting more than 31,000 farmers.

This includes payments worth £223 million to Countryside Stewardship revenue customers and £74 million to Environmental Stewardship customers, administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

This Government is providing over £5 billion to the farming budget – the largest ever increase investment in sustainable food production in our country’s history. To further support farmers, we have today announced new details on how farmers will benefit from improved and optimised farming schemes.

A new and improved Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) scheme will open in 2025, providing new quarterly payments designed to improve farmers’ cashflow and a rolling application window so customers can apply throughout the year. It also includes

new actions to improve flood resilience and species abundance and important funding to secure enhanced environmental benefits and deliver for nature recovery, including sensitive areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Our commitment to farmers is steadfast. That is why I'm working hard to get money into farmers' bank accounts as well as announcing today how farmers can benefit from the new CSHT scheme, with more flexible actions, improved payments to help cashflow and a rolling application window.

It's part of our £5 billion farming budget over two years - the largest ever directed at sustainable food production in our country's history. As we set out our Plan for Change, we are focused on supporting our farmers, supporting rural economic growth and boosting Britain's food security.

Our farmers are the heartbeat of the nation's rural economy, and I remain focused on supporting them by getting payments into bank accounts as quickly as possible.

I am very pleased that this December we have been able to inject more funding than ever from environmental schemes into the rural economy.

This comes at the same time as providing more certainty over the details in the CSHT offer to enable farmers to see for themselves how it can benefit them.

CSHT will open through an initial controlled roll out to ensure everyone gets the necessary support. Initially, applications will be by invitation – on a rolling monthly basis.

We are also publishing an additional 14 Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) endorsed actions, further improving the offer. These will be available from summer 2025 to enable farmers and land managers to contribute further benefits to Grassland, Heritage, and Coastal sites, among others.

Further payments made in December include £39 million under SFI, as part of the quarterly payments system designed to improve farmers' cashflow and a further £7.4 million has been paid to customers who have completed Capital Grants works.

As part of this Government's New Deal for Farmers, we will set up a new British Infrastructure Council to steer private investment in rural areas including broadband rollout in our rural communities.

We are also developing a 25-year farming roadmap, focusing on how to make the sector more profitable in the decades to come.

Farmers and land managers are stewards of the environment, and we will continue to invest in them to make their businesses, food production and our country more sustainable and resilient through Environmental Land Management.

JUSTICE**■ 10-year Prison Capacity Strategy and Annual Statement**

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood):

[\[HCWS294\]](#)

Integral to this government's Plan for Change is ensuring that we have the prison places we need to lock up dangerous criminals and keep the public safe.

On 4 December, the National Audit Office published a scathing report on 'Increasing the Capacity of the Prison Estate to meet demand'. It is unequivocal in its criticism of the previous Government's approach to the criminal justice system, including its commitment to deliver 20,000 additional prison places by the mid-2020s and failure to deliver, with only 500 additional cells being added to the overall prison places stock.

Significant delays to projects – in some cases running years behind schedule – and a failure to address rising demand have left the system thousands of places short of the capacity it requires. It is now clear that even the original mid-2020s commitment was not sufficient to keep pace with the expected demand on prison places, according to the last Government's own projections. This put the viability of the entire system in jeopardy. Had we run out of prison places, police would not have been able to make arrests and courts could not have held trials. It could have led to a total breakdown of law and order in our country – with all the associated risks to public safety.

The expected cost of MoJ and HMPPS's prison expansion portfolio to build 20,000 additional places is currently estimated to be £9.4bn to £10.1bn, which is at least £4.2 bn higher than estimated for the 2021 Spending Review. None of this was revealed by the last Government and only came to light when I became Lord Chancellor in July of this year.

Today, we publish the 10-year Prison Capacity Strategy and the first Annual Statement on prison capacity.

The Strategy is detailed, setting out our commitment to build the 14,000 places the last Government failed to deliver as part of their 20,000 prison place programmes, with the aim of completing it by 2031. It further sets out what, where, when and how we will build new prisons and expand existing prisons through additional houseblocks, refurbishments and temporary accommodation.

This strategy is realistic. Prison building is complex, notably the planning process to get sites approved for development. It is also costly to the taxpayer. Our delivery plans include contingency places to act as resilience to the programmes if a project becomes undeliverable or provides poor value for money and cannot be taken forward.

We are ambitious. This strategy sets out our work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to streamline the delivery of prison supply, including reforming the planning system, and delivering on our commitment to ensure prisons are recognised as nationally important infrastructure. This Government's ambition is to secure new land so that we are ready should further prison builds be required in future.

And we are committed to improving transparency, now and in the future. So, we will legislate, when parliamentary time allows, to make it a statutory requirement for the Government to publish an Annual Statement on prison capacity, like the one we are publishing today. The Annual Statement sets out prison population projections, the Department's plan for supply, and the current probation capacity position. This statement fulfils that transparency commitment for 2024, and holds us, and future Governments, to account on long-term planning, so that decisions on prison demand and supply are in balance.

Finally, we are being honest. Building enough prison places is only one part of the prolonged solution. In the coming years, the prison population will continue to increase more quickly than we can build new prisons. This is why, in October, I launched the Independent Sentencing Review. The Review will make recommendations in spring 2025, which will help us ensure there is always a prison place for dangerous offenders, that prisons enable offenders to turn their backs on crime and that we expand the range and use of punishment outside of prison.

I consider this 10-year Prison Capacity Strategy and the Annual Statement, along with the Independent Sentencing Review, necessary steps in our plan to protect the public and restore their confidence in the criminal justice system.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Outcome of the consent process under Schedule 6A Northern Ireland Act 1998

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn):

[\[HCWS295\]](#)

Following my Written Ministerial Statement of 2 December (HCWS277), I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Assembly held a vote on the continued application of Articles 5-10 of the Windsor Framework yesterday. The motion passed with a majority of the elected members voting, but not with cross-community support.

As set out in both Schedule 6A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Article 18 of the Windsor Framework, this result means that the next of these votes will take place in four years' time and not eight years' as cross-community support was not forthcoming.

I am now under a legal duty to commission an independent review into the functioning of the Framework. The review will report to me with its findings within six months, after which I shall be required to lay a copy of it before Parliament and then to respond.

The Government is, separately, obliged to inform the European Union of the result of the vote and the Minister for the Cabinet Office will shortly do so in line with the terms of the Windsor Framework. I shall continue to keep the House updated on these matters.