



Daily Report

Monday, 16 December 2024

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 16 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (07:23 P.M., 16 December 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

ATTORNEY GENERAL

■ Crime: Newcastle-under-Lyme

Adam Jogee:

[18760]

To ask the Solicitor General, what recent steps she has taken to help ensure the effective prosecution of (a) wildlife, (b) heritage, (c) rural and (d) waste crime in Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

Lucy Rigby:

This Government is committed to working with the police and other partners to address the blight of rural crime – broadly classified as any crime and anti-social behaviour occurring in rural areas. We are introducing tougher measures to clamp down on anti-social behaviour, stronger neighbourhood policing, and robust laws to prevent farm theft and fly-tippers.

We are recruiting 13,000 more neighbourhood police and police community support officers across England and Wales.

The National Police Chiefs' Council Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy 2022-2025 provides a framework through which policing, and partner bodies, can work together to tackle the most prevalent threats and emerging issues which predominantly affect rural communities. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutors work closely with local police officers to tackle farm equipment theft and other rural crime, alongside officers from the National Wildlife Crime Unit to tackle wildlife offences. Fly-tipping can be investigated by police but is usually prosecuted by the local authority rather than the CPS.

The CPS provides legal guidance on Wildlife, Rural and Heritage Crime which is available to all its prosecutors, to assist them in dealing with these cases. That guidance is available here: [Wildlife, Rural and Heritage Crime | The Crown Prosecution Service](#). The CPS also provides specialist training to ensure that its prosecutors have the expert knowledge needed to prosecute these crimes.

West Midlands CPS, within which Newcastle-under-Lyme falls, has a dedicated prosecutor to lead on wildlife, heritage, and rural crime.

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Aerospace Industry: Finance

Liam Byrne:

[19245]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much private investment he expects from the additional funding allocated to the aerospace sector in the next five years.

Sarah Jones:

The Budget confirmed £975m over 5 years to the Aerospace sector. This provides continued stability and confidence for industry to invest in long-term R&D projects – delivering economic growth, supporting high skilled jobs across all parts of the UK, and advancing aviation's net zero transition. Between 2013/14 and 2029/30, industry and government will invest over £5bn developing transformational aircraft technology. Long-term R&D co-investment is a core pillar of the Aerospace Growth Partnership's 2022 strategy, where the UK sector committed to invest at least £20bn of further private investment to 2040 and abate 125 MtCO₂ of UK attributable global aviation CO₂ emissions.

Liam Byrne:[\[19246\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure value for money from additional funding allocated to the aerospace sector in the next five years.

Sarah Jones:

The Budget confirmed £975m over 5 years to the Aerospace sector. Industry led applications for R&D co-investment from the ATI Programme enter a competitive process. Competition for funding is fierce and only the best projects are selected: those that offer real innovation, reduced emissions and tangible economic benefits to the UK. Each application is subject to a value for money assessment by DBT economists, which underpins the estimated benefits from the Programme of at least £20bn of further private investment to 2040 and abatement of 125 MtCO₂ of UK attributable global aviation CO₂ emissions.

■ British Steel**Andrew Griffith:**[\[19429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what meetings he has had with representatives from British Steel since 11 November 2024.

Sarah Jones:

We're working across government in partnership with trade unions and businesses to secure a bright future for steel in the UK, including working with British Steel on their future plans.

My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State has met with British Steel's shareholder on 5 occasions in the last 5 months. The most recent meeting was on 29 October. Senior officials from this Department meet representatives from British Steel on a weekly basis.

■ Business: Internet**Melanie Onn:**[\[17823\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential importance of business support functionalities by online platforms such as META.

Gareth Thomas:

Adoption of digital technologies, including social media such as META's Facebook and Instagram platforms, can significantly increase business productivity. The Department is working with the SME Digital Adoption Taskforce and the Cross-government Review of Technology Adoption on new ways to support this.

It is also important for government to provide and promote business support through a range of channels, to expand access. The Business Support Service offers tailored information and advice on social media, including Facebook, and organisations like the British Business Bank and local Growth Hubs maintain a presence on a range of online platforms including LinkedIn and YouTube.

■ Department for Business and Trade: Disclosure of Information**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[19279\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when he plans to publish transparency data on ministerial (a) gifts, (b) hospitality, (c) travel and (d) meetings the third quarter of 2024.

Justin Madders:

The Department for Business and Trade releases data on Ministerial gifts, hospitality, travel and meetings on the transparency pages of gov.uk. The next release, for the period July to September 2024, will be released on a date to be determined by the Cabinet Office.

■ Employment Rights Bill: Business**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[19281\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to his Department's news story entitled, Ministers tell business leaders they will be involved every step of the way in Make Work Pay plans, published on 3 September 2024 which (a) people attended and (b) businesses were represented at that business breakfast.

Justin Madders:

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Business and Trade were joined by officials, special advisers, and representatives from the following companies:

Burberry, BT Group, Co-op, DHL Supply Chain, Haleon, John Lewis, Mace Group, Mars Wrigley UK, McDonalds, Octopus Energy, Sainsbury's, Whitbread.

■ Employment Rights Bill: Small Businesses**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[19280\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill on small and medium-sized businesses.

Justin Madders:

On Monday 21 October, the Government published 24 Impact Assessments representing a comprehensive package of analysis on the impact of the Employment Rights Bill. These Impact Assessments are available at the following link:

<http://www.gov.uk/guidance/employment-rights-bill-impact-assessments>. As per our Better Regulation requirements, each Impact Assessment includes a small, medium and micro business assessment, which discuss the potential impacts of the Employment Rights Bill.

Farmers: Income**Josh Newbury:**[\[19467\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 5 November 2024 to Question 11619 on the Groceries Code Adjudicator: Finance, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of the £1 billion turnover threshold on farmers.

Justin Madders:

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is responsible for monitoring effectiveness of the Groceries (Supply Chain Practices) Market Investigation Order 2009 in ensuring that businesses, including farmers, that supply groceries directly to designated retailers are treated lawfully and fairly. This includes the £1 billion threshold at which a retailer can be designated by the CMA.

Financial Services: Environment Protection**Dame Harriett Baldwin:**[\[19278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of his Department's research on the EU Green Taxonomy Framework, published on 29 November 2024.

Justin Madders:

In November, the Department published research that it commissioned from the researcher provider, PUBLIC. This project was subject to robust procurement and contract oversight processes to ensure that it was conducted according to appropriate methodologies. The report compiles the views of interviewed businesses and does not necessarily reflect the views of UK government.

The government is currently consulting on whether a UK Green Taxonomy would be complementary to existing sustainable finance policies. Alongside the research, this consultation will inform an assessment of the value of implementing a UK Taxonomy, and how it could be designed as effectively as possible.

Foreign Investment in UK**Liam Byrne:**[\[19242\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to his Department's publication entitled Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, published in

October 2024, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of economic performance of sectors included in that strategy since 2019-20.

Sarah Jones:

The methodology for determining the eight growth-driving sectors is outlined in the Invest 2035 Green Paper. This included assessing historic trends since 2019-20, such as gross value added and productivity, at Standard Industrial Classification-2 level where data was available. The Government complemented this with wider internal and external data sources such as specialist industry reports and qualitative assessments, particularly in emerging subsectors where historic data is unavailable. Government will continue to draw in evidence such as sector performance and employment trends using responses to the Green Paper consultation questions; engagement with external stakeholders such as businesses, local leaders, academic experts; and other data sources.

■ **Infrastructure: Finance**

Greg Smith:

[\[19036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of changes in the Autumn Budget on the infrastructure sector.

Sarah Jones:

The Autumn Budget outlined The Government's commitment to support the infrastructure sector to rebuild Britain. It included plans to increase capital investment by over £100 billion in the next five years. This investment spans the infrastructure sector, including rebuilding schools and hospital, improving roads and public transport, building homes, and launching Great British Energy. Strengthening our infrastructure will drive substantial increases to our national income, positively impacting GDP.

The Government will also introduce reforms to enable greater delivery of infrastructure projects. This includes publishing a 10-year infrastructure strategy, establishing the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority and reforming the planning system.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Manufacturing Industries**

Liam Byrne:

[\[19244\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department plans to take to ensure value for money from additional funding allocated to the automotive sector in the next five years.

Sarah Jones:

The Budget committed over £2bn to 2030 for zero-emission vehicle manufacturing and their supply chains. This will build on the current Automotive Transformation Fund (ATF) and Advanced Propulsion Centre (APC) programmes to drive economic growth and support high-value jobs, unlocking billions of pounds of private investment in the UK's automotive industry and R&D innovation ecosystem.

As with the ATF and APC programmes, all future investment will be fully assessed on a strategic, technical, commercial, financial and economic basis – including consideration of future job creation. The economic assessment ensures value for money is consistent with HMT Green Book best practice.

■ Post Offices

Martin Wrigley:

[\[17939\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will ensure the Post Office withdraws the five-year Transformation Plan published on 13 November 2024..

Gareth Thomas:

While publicly owned, Post Office Limited is a commercial business that operates at arm's length from Government. The Post Office's transformation plan aims to put the Post Office on a more stable financial footing for the future, including by reducing costs, and to increase Postmaster remuneration. The details of the transformation plan are being examined by my Department, and the plan is subject to Government funding. The Post Office will continue to deliver on the 11,500 minimum branch requirement and geographical access criteria set by Government thereby ensuring that essential services remain within local reach of all citizens.

Longer term, Government has set out our plan to publish a Green Paper to consult with the public on the long-term future of the Post Office. This Green Paper will help inform what customers, communities and postmasters would like to see from a modern Post Office network.

■ Royal Mail: Universal Service Obligation

Mike Martin:

[\[19168\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the proposed sale of Royal Mail on its ability to fulfil its obligations as a universal service provider.

Justin Madders:

A reliable and affordable universal postal service that works for customers, workers and communities is crucial to the UK businesses that help drive growth across the country.

The universal service obligation is a legally binding commitment on the designated universal service provider and its ongoing provision is required irrespective of the ownership of the business.

■ Small Businesses: Exports

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[16522\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how much funding her Department has provided to help support small and medium-sized enterprises to export in each of the

last 15 years; and how much funding his Department has made available for this purpose in the 2024-25 financial year.

Gareth Thomas:

Given changes within the department and across government over the last 15 years further information on export specific funding cannot be provided without breaching the disproportionate cost limit.

The cost of support for SMEs to export over the previous 7 years is 2018/19 at £47.1m, 2019/20 £45.9m, 2020/21 £45.0m, 2021/22 £45.6m, 2022/23 £49.3m, 2023/24 £44.2m and 2024/25 £31.8m. This includes funding for grant programmes that have now concluded such as the Tradeshow Access Programme, UK Tradeshow Programme, Overseas Business Network initiative, and Internationalisation Fund.

■ **UK Internal Trade: Northern Ireland**

Sorcha Eastwood:

[18434]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he is taking steps to ensure that small businesses in Great Britain are aware of his Department's guidance entitled General product safety regulations: Northern Ireland: Guidance for businesses on Regulation 2023/988, published on 5 December 2024.

Justin Madders:

My officials have been engaging regularly with businesses on the new General Product Safety Regulations in Northern Ireland. The guidance for businesses has been shared with the business community in Great Britain and Northern Ireland through existing channels. My officials are also engaging with businesses through drop-in sessions, both before and after the Regulation takes effect in Northern Ireland.

CABINET OFFICE

■ **Cabinet Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Emily Thornberry:

[18906]

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Georgia Gould:

The guiding policy setting out the requirement to publish GPC transactions over £500 remains in place. Guidance is available to all government departments on gov.uk at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e8b402686650c18ce2cb541/Procurement_Cards_-_Pan_Government_Policy_V4_06042020.pdf

In support of the Government's Transparency agenda, the Cabinet Office publishes GPC spend data over £500 on gov.uk. Details of Cabinet Office spend on

government procurement card purchases over £500 can be found in the table below. Details of spend under £500 is not published.

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL SPEND ON PURCHASES OVER £500
2022/23	£1,210,718.39
2023/24	£1,054,654.09

■ Capital Punishment: Saudi Arabia

Andy Slaughter: [\[19268\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister raised the use of the death penalty for offences that do not meet international standards for the most serious crimes during his meeting with the (a) Prime Minister and (b) Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia.

Andy Slaughter: [\[19269\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister discussed with the Prime Minister and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia the (a) application of (i) Juvenile Law 2018 and (ii) Royal Decree 2020 and (b) risk of (A) the re-imposition of a death sentence on Abdullah al-Howaiti and (B) potential execution of Abdullah al-Derazi during their meeting on 9 December 2024.

Andy Slaughter: [\[19270\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether the Prime Minister made representations to the Prime Minister and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia on the prison sentences given to (a) Salma al-Shehab and (b) Noura al-Qahtani during his meeting on 9 December 2024.

Georgia Gould:

I refer the Hon Member to the read-out of the meeting.

■ Civil Servants: Health Services

Rupert Lowe: [\[17987\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil servants receive private healthcare through work schemes by Department.

Georgia Gould:

The Civil Service does not offer or subsidise private healthcare provision or insurance.

■ Civil Service: Remote Working

Mark Pritchard: [\[18358\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will install productivity tracking software to monitor work from home employment practices in the Civil Service.

Georgia Gould:

Most office-based civil servants are expected to spend 60% of their working time in the office, setting a consistent balance across the Civil Service. Departments, as individual employers, are responsible for any other measures.

■ Government Departments: Public Relations

Mr Richard Holden: [\[19412\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what information the Government Communications Service holds on the level of cross-government spending on external public relations firms in the last year for which figures are available.

Georgia Gould:

This information is not centrally held by the Cabinet Office.

■ Government People Group: Civil Servants

Mr Richard Holden: [\[18401\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many civil servants work in the Government People Group; and what the annual cost of the Group is.

Georgia Gould:

As at 9th December 2024, 836 (789 full time equivalent) civil servants work in Government People Group. Government People Group also currently directly employs 2097 Fast Streamers, through 14 centrally managed, profession based Fast Stream leadership development schemes. All Fast Streamers are deployed across government in roles covering a range of government professions.

2023/24 financial year operating costs relating to activities and services delivered by the Group were £254m. This includes the cost of Fast Streamers employed and deployed across government on non Government People Group activities.

■ National Security Unit for Procurement

Graeme Downie: [\[18299\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when the National Security Unit for Procurement plans to publish guidance for contracting authorities.

Georgia Gould:

The National Security Unit for Procurement (NSUP) will support the implementation of new powers to protect public procurement from suppliers that pose a threat to national security. It will become operational on commencement of the Procurement Act on February 24th 2025 and we plan to publish guidance for contracting

authorities on the application of the national security exclusion grounds ahead of that date. This is being complemented by more general training and engagement on the act run by the Cabinet Office's Transforming Public Procurement Programme, and the wider suite of guidance which is already available.

■ **Prime Minister: Aviation**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18211\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether members of the Lobby may take photographs on flights travelling with the Prime Minister.

Georgia Gould:

The lobby is able to take photographs on flights with the Prime Minister when conditions allow.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Charlton Athletic Football Club**

Mr Louie French:

[\[19086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the change to the rate of employer National Insurance contributions on Charlton Athletic football club.

Stephanie Peacock:

The government has protected the smallest businesses and charities from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500, which means that 865,000 employers will pay no NICs at all next year, more than half of employers will see no change or will gain overall from this package, and all eligible employers will be able to employ up to four full-time workers on the National Living Wage and pay no employer NICs.

The government published a Tax Information and Impact Note on 13 November which sets out the impact of the employer NICs changes.

■ **Football: Dementia**

David Pinto-Duschinsky:

[\[18851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking with the football authorities to support (a) ex-professional players impacted by football-related dementia and (b) their families.

Stephanie Peacock:

The safety, wellbeing and welfare of everyone taking part in sport is absolutely paramount.

National Governing Bodies are responsible for the regulation of their sports, and for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to protect participants from harm.

The Premier League and Professional Footballers' Association launched the Football

Brain Health Fund for players impacted by dementia in September 2023 to assist former players and their families impacted by neurodegenerative conditions.

The Government will continue to discuss athlete safety with the football authorities in the coming months to ensure that everyone can take part in sport as safely as possible.

■ Newspaper Press: Foreign Investment in UK

Jack Rankin: [\[19210\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when she plans to respond to the consultation on the Enterprise Act 2002 (Mergers Involving Newspaper Enterprises and Foreign Powers) Regulations 2024, published in May 2024.

Jack Rankin: [\[19590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make it her policy to reintroduce The Enterprise Act 2002 (Mergers Involving Newspaper Enterprises and Foreign Powers) Regulations 2024.

Stephanie Peacock:

We are currently considering responses to the consultation, and hope to publish a response in the near future.

■ Parthenon Sculptures

Saqib Bhatti: [\[19067\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she has had recent discussions with representatives of the British Museum on the Elgin Marbles.

Chris Bryant:

As the British Museum is a DCMS Arm's Length Body, both the Secretary of State and I have recently met its Chair and Director. The sculptures were one of a number of issues discussed.

Decisions relating to the care and management of its collection are a matter for the British Museum Trustees, acting within the law.

■ Prize Money

Alex Sobel: [\[18386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to limit the value of prizes offered by large-scale commercial Prize Draws.

Alex Sobel: [\[18387\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled High stakes: gambling reform for the digital age, published on 27 April 2023, when she plans to introduce consumer protections for players of large-scale commercial prize draws.

Alex Sobel:

[18388]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to bring forward secondary legislation to regulate large-scale commercial prize draws.

Stephanie Peacock:

Large scale commercial prize draws are a significant and growing market. 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. Independent research was commissioned in 2023, looking at possible gambling harm and assessing the impact of potential regulation, and will inform our policy considerations. The department is grateful for the voluntary action taken so far by the sector to act transparently and apply player protection measures. We want to ensure high standards in this area and the Minister for Gambling will be meeting the sector to discuss this work.

■ Prize Money: Research

Alex Sobel:

[18602]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to publish the research that her Department has commissioned London Economics to undertake on the online prize draws and competitions market.

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.

■ Religious Buildings

Ruth Jones:

[19387]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many (a) Buddhist, (b) Jewish, (c) Muslim, (d) Sikh and (e) other non-Christian places of worship are listed in (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland for their architecture or historic interest.

Chris Bryant:

Each devolved nation is responsible for its own listings regime. Details on listed buildings can be found on the public lists maintained by [Historic England](#), [Cadw](#), [Historic Environment Scotland](#) and the [Department for Communities](#) in Northern Ireland respectively. The list maintained by Historic England is searchable by key words which can include denomination.

■ **Rugby**

Mr Louie French: [19085]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with the Rugby Football Union on the future of rugby union in England.

Stephanie Peacock:

I met with the Rugby Football Union in early November to discuss the future of the sport and my department is in regular contact with the rugby union authorities. The department continues to work with the RFU and the wider sport sector to support the ongoing sustainability of elite level sport.

■ **Streaming**

Laura Trott: [19396]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to part 4 of Ofcom's publication entitled, Media Bill: Ofcom's roadmap to regulation, published in February 2024, whether Ofcom plans to publish its review of audience protection measures implemented by video-on-demand service providers.

Stephanie Peacock:

A timeline of the steps Ofcom is taking to implement the Media Act 2024 can be found on their website at <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/Media-Act-Implementation/>.

Ofcom's timeline currently advises that their report concerning the audience protection measures implemented by video-on-demand service providers will be published between July and September 2025.

■ **Television Licences: Non-payment**

Rupert Lowe: [19131]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to decriminalise non-payment of the BBC licence fee.

Stephanie Peacock:

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

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

The Government has also laid regulations before Parliament to extend the Simple Payment Plan, to enable more households in financial hardship to pay their TV licence in flexible fortnightly or monthly installments. This is expected to come into

force on 31st January 2025, subject to the regulations concluding the necessary parliamentary procedure.

Rupert Lowe:

[19132]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what information her Department holds on the number of enforcement visits there were for non-payment of the BBC licence fee in each of the last three years.

Stephanie Peacock:

The BBC is responsible for collection and enforcement of the TV licence. The BBC has published figures on field visits made by TV Licensing in its most recent TV Licence Fee Trust Statement, which can be viewed here:

<https://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/about/bbc-trust-statement-AB21>

■ Youth Organisations: Finance

Dame Caroline Dinéage:

[18526]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if her Department will take steps to support the funding of uniformed youth organisations to (a) help tackle waiting lists and (b) expand volunteering opportunities for young people.

Stephanie Peacock:

This Government fully recognises the importance of youth services to help young people live safe and healthy lives, and we are committed to giving all young people the chance to reach their full potential. This year, our department has funded eight uniformed youth organisations to help reduce waiting lists, create more spaces for young people, and offer new volunteering opportunities. Additionally, we are supporting key initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, the #iwill Fund, and Adventures Away from Home, all aimed at creating opportunities for young people.

■ Youth Services: Civil Society

Dame Caroline Dinéage:

[18525]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Civil Society Covenant Framework, published on 17 October 2024, what steps her Department is taking to engage with civil society on the development of the National Youth Strategy.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Civil Society Covenant will set out the terms of a new relationship between government and civil society through high level principles for an effective long term partnership between government and all of civil society. The complementary National Youth Strategy will be co-produced with young people and the youth sector. Both the Covenant and National Youth Strategy will be published in 2025.

Over the coming months we will be developing our plans for the National Youth Strategy, in partnership with young people and with organisations within the youth sector, including civil society organisations. In November we held a roundtable with young ambassadors from the #iWill movement and in early December we held a

roundtable with young people in Bristol. In early 2025, we will be holding further youth-led roundtables and will set up a Youth Advisory Group to work alongside us.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces: Discharges

Shaun Davies: [18422]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people left the armed forces in each of the last five years, and what information his Department holds on the different types of departure.

Shaun Davies: [18423]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what information his Department holds on the reasons why staff leave the armed forces; and what the most common reasons are.

AI Carns:

The number of people who have left the Armed Forces within the last five years can be found in the table below, and was extracted from the quarterly Service Personal Statistics 2024 on gov.uk at the following link

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2024>

		12 MONTHS				
		ENDING:	2020	2021	2022	2023 2024
31 Mar	31 Mar	31 Mar	31 Mar	31 Mar	31 Mar	
Tri Service:						
Trained (RN/RM and RAF) and Trade Trained (Army) Outflow	11,797	8,649	10,610	13,464	13,275	
Voluntary Outflow	7,379	5,268	5,978	8,400	8,101	
Time Expiry	1,854	1,572	2,026	2,147	1,960	
Other Reasons	2,564	1,809	2,606	2,917	3,214	

According to the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) 2024, the top three factors increasing, or strongly increasing, intentions to leave were due to the impact of Service life on family and personal life; opportunities outside the Service and the amount of pay. Full results can be found at the

following link:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-2024>

■ **Armed Forces: Housing**

Helen Maguire: **[18069]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many incidents of (a) mould, (b) fire, and (c) flooding were recorded in military service personnel housing in each month in (a) 2022 and (b) 2023.

Al Carns:
The number of reported incidents of damp and mould, fire, and flooding in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in each month in 2022 and 2023 is detailed in the tables below:

Damp and Mould reported in SFA:

2022	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	2023	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Jan-22	-	Jan-23	1,204
Feb-22	-	Feb-23	592
Mar-22	-	Mar-23	534
Apr-22	176	Apr-23	341
May-22	326	May-23	325
Jun-22	268	Jun-23	192
Jul-22	225	Jul-23	199
Aug-22	207	Aug-23	201
Sep-22	215	Sep-23	199
Oct-22	389	Oct-23	408
Nov-22	1157	Nov-23	575
Dec-22	817	Dec-23	455
Total	3,780	Total	5,225

Fire Incidents reported in SFA:

2022	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	2023	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Jan-22	-	Jan-23	2

2022	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	2023	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Feb-22	-	Feb-23	1
Mar-22	-	Mar-23	0
Apr-22	3	Apr-23	2
May-22	0	May-23	0
Jun-22	2	Jun-23	3
Jul-22	1	Jul-23	2
Aug-22	1	Aug-23	1
Sep-22	1	Sep-23	0
Oct-22	2	Oct-23	2
Nov-22	1	Nov-23	0
Dec-22	1	Dec-23	2
Total	12	Total	15

The figures for fires in SFA, include smells of burning or a melted plug and the figures for flooding in Service Family Accommodation include incidents that occur inside the property and includes garages and outhouses.

Flooding Incidents reported in SFA:

2022	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	2023	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Jan-22	-	Jan-23	59
Feb-22	-	Feb-23	33
Mar-22	-	Mar-23	34
Apr-22	9	Apr-23	16
May-22	14	May-23	18
Jun-22	18	Jun-23	21
Jul-22	20	Jul-23	18
Aug-22	12	Aug-23	25
Sep-22	25	Sep-23	18
Oct-22	10	Oct-23	29

2022	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	2023	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Nov-22	25	Nov-23	17
Dec-22	81	Dec-23	30
Total	214	Total	318

The number of reported incidents of damp and mould, in Single Living Accommodation (SLA) in each month in 2022 and 2023 is detailed in the table below:

Damp and Mould in SLA:

2022	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	2023	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Jan-22	-	Jan-23	226
Feb-22	-	Feb-23	240
Mar-22	-	Mar-23	216
Apr-22	74	Apr-23	119
May-22	126	May-23	216
Jun-22	132	Jun-23	241
Jul-22	134	Jul-23	163
Aug-22	93	Aug-23	155
Sep-22	99	Sep-23	167
Oct-22	153	Oct-23	233
Nov-22	171	Nov-23	305
Dec-22	101	Dec-23	182
Total	1,083	Total	2,463

The number of reported incidents of fire and flood, in SLA can only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Data relating to incidents prior to April 2022 is not held as this predates the current Future Defence Infrastructure Services contracts.

The figures for damp and mould include work orders raised and can include small amounts of mould where a bathroom has not been ventilated.

James Cartlidge: [\[18981\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Written Statement by the then Minister for Defence Procurement on 13 November 2023 on Service Family Accommodation and Winter Planning, HCWS28, whether he plans to make a Ministerial Statement outlining his Department's planned programme of work to support service accommodation this winter.

AI Carns:

The Ministry of Defence currently has no plans to make a Ministerial Statement outlining the Department's planned programme of work to support Service Family Accommodation this winter.

James Cartlidge: [\[19376\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department plans to spend on (a) upgrading and (b) otherwise maintaining (i) single living accommodation and (ii) service families accommodation in (A) the 2024-25 financial year and (B) each remaining financial year of this Parliament.

AI Carns:

The forecast spend for maintaining and improving Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in financial year (FY) 2024-25 is circa £400 million. Of this, circa £131 million is to be spent on improving/upgrading SFA and circa £309 million is to be spent on maintenance.

The forecast spend for Single Living Accommodation (SLA) in FY 2024-25 is circa £163 million. Of this, circa £56 million is to be spent on upgrading SLA and circa £107 million is to be spent on maintenance.

Funding allocation beyond FY 2024-25 is not yet known and will be dependent on the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review.

■ Armed Forces: Private Education

James Cartlidge: [\[18983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will publish an assessment of the potential impact of VAT on school fees on children of service families who are (a) in receipt of Continuity of Education Allowance and (b) attending an independent school but not in receipt of that Allowance.

AI Carns:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) provides Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) to Service personnel to minimise the disruption to their children's education caused by service commitments involving frequent moves of the family home. Their circumstances must fit within specific regulations as laid out in Joint Service Publication (JSP) 752 (Tri-Service Regulations for Expenses and Allowances), Chapter 14, especially around accompanied service and family mobility.

The single Services will monitor the impact on retention in service for those claiming CEA following the introduction of VAT on independent school fees. The Pay and

Allowances Casework and Complaints Cell (PACCC) will monitor the impact on Service personnel changing schools and withdrawing from CEA. Where a Service person does not meet the eligibility criteria as laid out in JSP 752 and has made a personal choice to use a private school for their child's education, the MOD is not involved.

James Cartlidge:

[\[19373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an estimate of the potential cost to his Department of the Continuity of Education Allowance for financial year (a) 2024-25, (b) 2025-26, (c) 2026-27, (d) 2027-28 and (e) 2028-29.

Al Carns:

Following the Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) in year re-rating exercise, the cost of the allowance for Financial Year 2024-25 is £95 million. The cost for Financial Year 2025-2026 is estimated at £104.4 million (based on current rates and cost). Due to the way the Ministry of Defence carries out its annual CEA rate calculation each summer, ready for the new Academic Year in September, estimates for Financial Years 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29 cannot be provided at this time.

■ **Armed Forces: Recruitment**

Shaun Davies:

[\[18424\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has conducted qualitative research into recruitment barriers in the Armed Forces.

Luke Pollard:

The new Government's work in improving retention and recruitment is part of a package of measures aimed to renew the contract between the nation and those who serve. We are modernising and refining our policies and processes to attract, and then retain the best possible talent, highlighting that Defence is a modern, forward-facing employer which offers a valuable and rewarding career. Within this work we are drawing on qualitative research to inform decisions and steer direction, ensuring that desired outcomes are achieved in the most effective ways.

■ **Armed Forces: Separated People**

Shaun Davies:

[\[18686\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps his Department is taking to support Armed Forces personnel with children when there is a breakdown in family arrangements.

Al Carns:

Joint Service Publication (JSP) 770 (Tri-Service Operational and Non-Operational Welfare Policy) provides a framework for the delivery of a widely recognised and accessible support structure that secures and improves the wellbeing of Service personnel and the Service community.

Whilst JSP 770 recognises that Service personnel have responsibility for their own immediate welfare and that of their family, the Chain of Command have prime responsibility for the welfare support of those personnel under their command and their entitled families when their wellbeing is at risk. Delivery of welfare support to Service personnel and entitled family members is therefore a single Service responsibility and includes provision of welfare support to Service families experiencing separation and divorce.

JSP 770 can be accessed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/480979/FOI_04718-JSP_770_Final_v10-U.pdf.

In addition, the Armed Forces Covenant also ensures that support is provided to Armed Forces families. It ensures, amongst other things, that those who currently serve or who have served, as well as their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services. The Covenant Legal Duty obliges certain local public bodies to have due regard to the Covenant principles when conducting functions in healthcare, education, and housing. Local authorities are subject to this legal obligation in relation to social housing and homelessness.

■ Armed Forces: Working Conditions

Shaun Davies:

[18687]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of working conditions in the Armed Forces on the (a) mental health and (b) familial relations of Armed Forces personnel.

Al Carns:

Defence considers its people to be its greatest asset and is committed to the health and wellbeing of our personnel and their families. We recognise that the unique nature of Service life can cause stress and strain.

We invest in, and act upon, mechanisms designed to understand the opinions and attitudes of Service personnel and their families. Through the annual Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) and Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) we gather information on the views and experiences of our personnel and their families, including topics such as morale and accommodation, which will impact on family life. The information from these surveys helps shape policies for training, support, and the terms and conditions of service.

All Service personnel can also access pastoral and welfare care from a variety of sources, including from within their Chain of Command, Service welfare organisations, contracted Social Work Services, Families Federations and, where appropriate, Service Charities. Specialist mental health support for Service personnel is also available, including on-demand digital resources, and in-person welfare establishments.

The latest AFCAS and FAMCAS data can be found at the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-summaries>.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-summaries/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-2024-summary>

■ **Armed Forces: Workplace Pensions**

Mr Mark Francois:

[19255]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 16450 on Armed Forces: Workplace Pensions, what role his Department will play in the consultation process; and whether his Department plans to provide (a) input and (b) guidance on how inheritance tax proposals may impact the Armed Forces Pension Scheme.

AI Carns:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) will not be responding to HM Revenue and Customs' technical consultation on the proposed change for unused pension funds and death benefits to be included within the value of a person's estate for Inheritance Tax purposes. The MOD will follow legislation as per Government proposals and guidance will be developed for members in due course.

Mr Mark Francois:

[19256]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 16450 on Armed Forces: Workplace Pensions, whether his Department plans issue additional guidance to Armed Forces Pension Scheme (a) members and (b) nominees on potential changes to inheritance tax liabilities for death in service lump sums.

AI Carns:

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) will follow legislation as per Government proposals. Following the conclusion of HM Revenue and Customs' technical consultation, the MOD will assess the impact of death in service lump sums for members of the Armed Forces and relevant nominees. Guidance will then subsequently be developed and provided to members in due course.

■ **Challenger Tanks: Procurement**

Mr Mark Francois:

[19253]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost of the Challenger 3 main battle tank development programme is including budget increases due to delays.

Maria Eagle:

Through the Armour Main Battle Tank programme, expenditure for Challenger 3 Main Battle Tank delivery as of 13 December 2024 is c£421.167 million.

■ **Defence**

Helen Maguire: [\[18836\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the planned 10% cut to his Department's headcount on military capability.

Maria Eagle:

We are currently reviewing the civil service workforce required to deliver Defence's strategy, and to align with the Chancellor's announcement on public spending and the recent budget. We are committed to having an agile and sustainable workforce with the right skills, whilst maximising value for the taxpayer.

The Strategic Defence Review will ensure our people are at the heart of Defence's plans, supporting the security, economic growth and prosperity of the UK.

Over time the civil service workforce will be smaller, but also a team that is better able to deliver Defence outputs efficiently and effectively.

■ **F-35 Aircraft: Procurement**

Mr Mark Francois: [\[19252\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the (a) total, (b) procurement and (c) sustainment cost of the F-35 Lightning II programme; and whether that programme has been delayed from its original schedule.

Maria Eagle:

Portfolio data is published annually in support of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) Annual Report which includes a budget baseline and the latest HM Treasury approved estimates in respect of whole life costs. The reports are published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mod-government-major-projects-portfolio-data-2023>

The financial data for the Lightning Programme in the IPA Gateway Review Report for June 2024 is withheld under Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Commercial Interests).

■ **Gaza: F-35 Aircraft**

Apsana Begum: [\[19044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether F-35 fighter jets used by the Israel Defence Force in operations in Gaza contain components made in the UK.

Maria Eagle:

F-35 components produced in the UK are crucial to the production and support of the global F-35 fleet and UK produced components are present on every F-35 aircraft.

UK suppliers do not have control of the components once they are exported from the UK and are placed in the global spares pool or on the aircraft assembly lines.

■ Guided Weapons

James Cartlidge:

[\[18157\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he has authorised any orders for Joint Air-to-Ground Missiles since the general election.

Maria Eagle:

No, Joint Air-to-Ground Missiles remains one of the top priorities for the Army as it's critical to providing the Apache with the means to fight on the modern battlefield. In-Year Funding has been protected to ensure this procurement can proceed.

■ LGBT Veterans Independent Review

Dr Andrew Murrison:

[\[18352\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his planned timetable is for publication of the response to the financial award section of the LGBT Veterans Independent Review, published on 19 July 2023.

Al Carns:

I am pleased to say that on 12 December 2024, during a debate held in Parliament, the Secretary of State announced that the LGBT Financial Recognition Scheme would be launched on 13 December 2024, with a budget of £75 million. This Scheme intends to provide recognition to those impacted by the Ban.

■ Military Aircraft: Helicopters

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[18504\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16457 on Puma Helicopters, what estimate his Department has made of the cost of fulfilling the short-term capability gaps in (a) Cyprus and (b) Brunei prior to the entry of the H-145 platform into service in 2026; and how he plans to manage these costs within his Department's existing budget.

Maria Eagle:

The Department is scoping a variety of options to fulfil the short-term capability gaps before H-145 enters service from 2026. A final decision is yet to be made on the specific capability solution; thus we are not yet able to disclose our proposed capability solution. Any incurred costs will be managed within current budgets to ensure the solutions provide maximum value for money.

■ Ministry of Defence: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution

Emily Thornberry:

[\[18905\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Maria Eagle:

Departmental spend on Government procurement card (GPC) purchase above £500 net of refunded payments is published here in line with Government policy:

[MOD: spending over £500 on a GPC for January to December 2022 - GOV.UK](#)

[MOD: spending over £500 on a GPC for January to December 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

The total spend for those purchases below £500 and net of refunded payments is set out below:

Between January and December 2022: £14,409,930.39

Between January and December 2023: £19,274,574.11

■ **Ministry of Defence: Employers' Contributions****James Cartlidge:**[\[18982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November to Question 11939 on Ministry of Defence: Employers Contributions, if he will list the total cost to his Department from the employer National Insurance Contributions announced in the Autumn Budget for each remaining financial year of this Parliament.

Maria Eagle:

His Majesty's Treasury has confirmed they will provide funding towards the increased cost of National Insurance contributions for the Department.

The additional cost of employer National Insurance contributions in future years will be subject to changes in workforce numbers and pay. Budgets beyond next financial year will be subject to the second phase of the Spending Review.

■ **Ministry of Defence: Paternity Pay****Shaun Davies:**[\[18421\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much his Department paid in paternity pay to (a) civilian and (b) military staff in each of the last five years; and to how many fathers.

Al Carns:

The below table details the number of people who took paternity leave for either the birth or adoption of a child in each of the last five calendar years. The amount paid to staff will take longer to compile and I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

CALENDAR YEAR	COUNT OF CIVILIAN PERSON NUMBER	COUNT OF MILITARY PERSON NUMBER
2020	306	2,400
2021	348	2,435

CALENDAR YEAR	COUNT OF CIVILIAN PERSON NUMBER	COUNT OF MILITARY PERSON NUMBER
2022	495	2,299
2023	457	2,122
2024	420	1,667
Grand Total	2,026	10,923

■ Ministry of Defence: Staff

James Cartlidge: [\[19377\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Answer of 12 March 2024 to Question 18057, how many such complaints his Department received between (a) 1 January and 31 March, (b) 1 April and 5 July and (c) 6 July and 11 December 2024.

AI Carns:

The tables below show the number of reported complaints relating to Service Family Accommodation and Single Living Accommodation between 1 January and 31 March, 1 April and 5 July and 6 July and 11 December 2024.

Service Family Accommodation

DATES	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
01/01/2024 - 31/03/2024	2,291
01/04/2024 - 05/07/2024	1,787
06/07/2024 - 11/12/2024	2,567
Total	6,645

Single Living Accommodation

DATES	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
01/01/2024 - 31/03/2024	57
01/04/2024 - 05/07/2024	46
06/07/2024 - 11/12/2024	112
Total	215

■ Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Decommissioning**David Reed:****[R] [17479]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the decision to retire (a) HMS Albion, (b) HMS Bulwark, (c) HMS Northumberland, (d) RFA Wave Knight and (e) RFA Wave Ruler on the (i) training and (ii) readiness of Armed Forces personnel.

Luke Pollard:

The retirement of HMS Albion and Bulwark will not impact the operational programme of the Royal Marines, who continue to deploy globally.

Both are currently held at lower readiness having not been to sea since 2023 and 2017 respectively. This Government inherited a position where neither was due to go to sea again before their planned out of service dates of 2033 and 2034.

The Royal Marines are supported by the three Bay Class Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary) and RFA ARGUS, which also provides aviation support and can act as a casualty receiving ship. These ships will continue to support amphibious capability until they are succeeded by planned Multi Role Support Ships.

■ Nuclear-free Zones: Treaties**James Cartlidge:****[18986]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16455 on Nuclear-free Zones: Treaties, whether the proposed treaty with Mauritius on the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands will include an exemption for the military base at Diego Garcia from all protocols, with the exception of protocols I and II, of the Treaty of Pelindaba.

Luke Pollard:

With reference to the answers that I provided to questions 16455 and 18117, asked by the Rt Hon Member for Rayleigh and Wickford, the UK's 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. 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.

■ Poland: Guided Weapons**James Cartlidge:****[19374]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent progress his Department has made on the Narew UK-Poland missile defence partnership.

Maria Eagle:

Further to finalisation of a contract between Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa (PGZ) and MBDA(UK), Polish and UK industry are now delivering the Narew air defence contract worth over £4 billion. The deal was supported by UK Export Finance.

Strategic Defence Review**David Reed:**[\[18315\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his Answer of 26 July to Question 198 on Defence, what the cost to date of the Strategic Defence Review is (a) in total and (b) by category of allowance or expenditure.

Luke Pollard:

On 17 July 2024, the Prime Minister commissioned the Defence Secretary to oversee the Strategic Defence Review, which is headed by three external Reviewers, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, General Sir Richard Barrons and Dr Fiona Hill CMG. The Review is being conducted with the best value for money for Defence in mind, within current budgets. Costs will be provided after the review has concluded.

David Reed:[\[18316\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 25 July to Question 189 on Defence, what steps he is taking to consult widely with (a) serving personnel and (b) veterans.

Al Carns:

The Strategic Defence Review is considering all aspects of Defence, involving - and receiving inputs from - other Government Departments, agencies and industry, in areas where they support UK Defence. It is to be Britain's review-not just the Government's-so the reviewers consulted serving military, veterans, MPs of all parties, industry, and academia, to support their analysis throughout the review and challenge process.

Type 26 Frigates: Procurement**Mr Mark Francois:**[\[19254\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost overrun is on the Type 26 frigate programme; and what steps he is taking to (a) mitigate further (i) delays and (ii) costs in the development of the fleet and (b) reduce the impact of delays on the Royal Navy's operational capacity.

Maria Eagle:

As confirmed in a Written Ministerial Statement released on 2 November 2022 (HCWS352), the Ministry of Defence is forecasting a 12-month delay to the Type 26 Initial Operating Capability from October 2027 to October 2028. The associated cost growth is forecast to be £233 million; an increase of approximately 4.2%.

Investment in new facilities at Govan to increase productivity include a new Shipbuilding Outfit Hall, Shipbuilding Academy and steelwork panel lines. The new

Shipbuilding Hall will enable the construction of two ships undercover simultaneously. This will improve schedule performance and the pace of delivery, allowing the time between ship deliveries to be reduced.

This will not result in a capability gap; Type 26 will be a world beating frigate and the class will be delivered in time to take on the anti-submarine warfare duties of the retiring Type 23 ships.

■ Typhoon Aircraft: Exports

Mr Mark Francois: [\[18506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department has agreed a provisional timeline with Qatar for the (a) signing and (b) delivery of the 12 additional Typhoon jets.

Maria Eagle:

Following the Amir of Qatar's State Visit to the UK, we have agreed to deepen cooperation in support of regional security while supporting growth and prosperity in both nations. This includes undertaking opportunities to strengthen our respective defence capabilities through broadening our cooperation on the Typhoon and Hawk partnerships. We will continue to hold discussions with Qatar on these issues, including prospective timelines, when appropriate.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[18507\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the production of 12 additional Typhoon jets for Qatar on the defence supply chain.

Maria Eagle:

Following the Amir of Qatar's State Visit to the UK, we have agreed to deepen cooperation in support of regional security while supporting growth and prosperity in both nations. This includes undertaking opportunities to strengthen our respective defence capabilities through broadening our cooperation on the Typhoon and Hawk partnerships. Any potential impacts on the defence supply chain will be fully considered, alongside industry, as our discussions with Qatar evolve.

■ Veterans: Radiation Exposure

Sir John Hayes: [\[17506\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what estimate he has made of the anticipated total cost of compensation for legal claims brought by Nuclear Test Veterans.

Al Carns:

The claims from Nuclear Test Veterans are at the pre-action stage. It is for the Claimants' legal representatives to formulate their case against the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in court should they wish to proceed. The MOD is not able to estimate the value of compensation claimed without an indication of the level of damages sought by the prospective Claimants.

■ War Pensions

Vikki Slade:

[18309]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of the monthly payment of war pensions.

Al Carns:

The War Pension Scheme (WPS) compensates for any injury, illness or death which was caused by service before 6 April 2005. There are two main types of WPS awards depending on the level of disablement:

1. A gratuity is a tax free lump sum payment for disablement less than 20%
2. A war disablement pension is an ongoing tax free payment paid weekly or monthly for disablement more than 20%

Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/war-pension-scheme-wps>

EDUCATION

■ Carers

Blake Stephenson:

[18430]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to carry out kinship carers pilot trials in eight local authority areas.

Janet Daby:

Through the Autumn Budget 2024, this government announced a £40 million package to trial a new kinship allowance in up to 10 local authorities to test whether paying an allowance to cover the additional costs of supporting the child can help increase the number of children taken in by family members and friends. This trial will help the department make decisions about future national rollout. The department will share further detail on the process for selecting the local authorities taking part in the programme in due course.

Blake Stephenson:

[18431]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to produce a national kinship carers strategy.

Janet Daby:

The government is determined to give every child the opportunities they deserve, and kinship carers play a crucial role in delivering this.

In November 2024, the government published 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive', which is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67375fe5ed0fc07b53499a42/Keeping_Children_Safe_Helping_Families_Thrive_.pdf. This statement set out the government's intention to rebalance the children's social care system and improve

outcomes for children in care, care leavers and families. This publication includes the key principle of supporting children to live with kinship carers when it is in their best interest.

The department recently announced a £40 million package to trial a new Kinship Allowance in up to ten local authorities, to test whether paying an allowance to cover the additional costs of supporting the child can help increase the number of children taken in by family members and friends.

This is the single biggest investment made by government in kinship care to date. This investment could transform the lives of vulnerable children who can no longer live at home, by allowing children to grow up within their families and communities, reducing disruption to their early years and allowing them to focus on schooling and building friendships.

■ Carers: Social Security Benefits

Grahame Morris: [\[18926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to announce the ten pilot areas for the Kinship Care Allowance.

Janet Daby:

The department recognises the important role that kinship carers play in caring for some of the most vulnerable children, and the role local authorities have in supporting them.

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

The department will share further details on the process for selecting local authorities in due course.

■ Children: Reading

Andrew Cooper: [\[19139\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential implications for its policies of the National Literacy Trust's report entitled Children and Young People's Reading in 2024, published in November 2024.

Catherine McKinnell:

High and rising school standards, with excellent foundations in reading, writing and mathematics, are at the heart of the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best start in life.

We know that reading for pleasure is hugely important and brings a range of benefits. As well as strong links with attainment, wide recreational reading expands pupils'

knowledge about the world and about language, as well as their understanding of subject-specific academic and technical vocabulary.

Further, pupils who read regularly report heightened levels of social and emotional wellbeing. For many, reading is a form of relaxation, a place to escape everyday challenges, a source of entertainment. Reading allows readers to adopt new perspectives, develop empathy and become more socially conscious.

In recognition of this, the department has implemented a range of measures to support reading for pleasure.

Schools are supported with the teaching of phonics, early language development and reading for pleasure with a further £23 million committed for the 2024/25 academic year to support this work. Further, the government's reading framework provides guidance on improving reading teaching provision to ensure that every child is not only able to read proficiently, but also develops a genuine love of reading.

The current national curriculum states that teachers are expected to encourage pupils to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information. The programmes of study for English make clear the importance of reading for pleasure.

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

The Review will look closely at the key challenges to attainment for young people, in line with the government's ambition for a curriculum that delivers excellent foundations in reading, writing and mathematics, and ensures every young person gets the opportunity to develop creative, digital, and speaking and listening skills particularly prized by employers.

We recognise the important work of organisations such as the National Literacy Trust in promoting reading and will continue to engage with them on this important issue.

■ Curriculum and Teaching Methods

Anna Dixon:

[18474]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of a national bank of lesson and curriculum resources for primary and secondary school teachers.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department has provided funding to Oak National Academy (Oak), a non-departmental public body, to provide free, optional and adaptable curriculum and lesson resources for primary and secondary school teachers. These resources are available on Oak's website at: <https://www.thenational.academy/>.

The government has commissioned an independent review of Oak. The review will include an assessment of whether Oak is delivering services that meet the needs of teachers and young people.

■ Faith Schools: Admissions

Neil O'Brien:

[19003]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to publish a response to the consultation on Faith school designation reforms.

Catherine McKinnell:

The consultation on faith school designation closed on 20 June. The department is analysing the responses and we will respond in due course.

■ Pupils

Sir John Hayes:

[18342]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made a recent estimate of how many primary school children in England were born overseas.

Catherine McKinnell:

The information requested is not held by the department. The department publishes information on ethnicity and whether a pupil is known to speak English as a first language or not. This information can be found in the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics' publication, which is based on January school census data. The most recently published figures can be accessed at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>. Neither ethnicity nor language can be used as a proxy to determine whether a pupil was born overseas.

■ Pupils: Absenteeism

Sir John Hayes:

[18347]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many fixed penalty notices have been handed out for school non-attendance in (a) Lincolnshire and (b) England in each of the last five years.

Stephen Morgan:

The department collects information from local authorities on penalty notices issued for unauthorised absence. This is published in the statistical release on parental responsibility measures and can be accessed at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/parental-responsibility-measures>.

The numbers of penalty notices issued in Lincolnshire and England can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/169aa7d0-a3ce-44bc-0f1d-08dd167ca495>.

No data was collected for 2019/20 due to the pandemic. Attendance at school was heavily disrupted in 2020/21 and for two months measures were disapplied when schools were not open to all pupils.

■ Relationships and Sex Education: Gender

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to prevent the teaching of gender ideology in schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

Compulsory relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) should help pupils to understand that society consists of a diverse range of people. By the end of their secondary education, pupils are taught about equality and the law relating to protected characteristics, which includes sex and gender reassignment. It is important that the content schools teach is factual, age-appropriate and presents political issues in a balanced way.

The department is currently reviewing the RSHE statutory guidance. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has been clear that children's wellbeing must be at the heart of both the RSHE and gender questioning guidance for schools. The government is looking carefully at the public consultation responses for both sets of guidance and discussing with stakeholders. We will consider all the relevant evidence, including the Cass Review which has since been published, before setting out next steps.

■ School Libraries

Andrew Cooper:

[\[19140\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of school libraries on pupils' (a) attainment and (b) wellbeing.

Andrew Cooper:

[\[19141\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of primary school libraries on social disadvantage.

Catherine McKinnell:

Reading for pleasure is hugely important and is associated with a range of academic, social and emotional benefits. The 2021 Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study data for England showed that the pupils who said they liked reading the most scored, on average, 34 points more than those who said they did not like reading.

As well as strong links between reading for pleasure and attainment, pupils who read regularly report heightened levels of social and emotional wellbeing. For many, reading is a form of relaxation, a place to escape everyday challenges, a source of entertainment. Reading allows readers to adopt new perspectives, develop empathy and become more socially conscious. Further, wide recreational reading expands pupils' knowledge about the world and about language, as well as their understanding of subject-specific academic and technical vocabulary.

School libraries complement public libraries in giving pupils access to a range of books and other kinds of texts, both in and out of school. School funding can be used to fund book corners, school libraries and librarians.

In July 2023, the department published an updated version of the reading framework. It provides guidance for schools on improving reading teaching provision and how to create a school reading culture, where every child is not only able to read proficiently, but also develops a genuine love of reading. It also includes guidance for schools on how to organise their school library, book corner or books stock to make reading accessible and attractive to readers. It suggests ways of organising and promoting books, so that pupils are well supported to choose them by and for themselves.

The department acknowledges the work of the National Literacy Trust and other organisations in this area. The National Literacy Trust's 2024 Annual Literacy Survey found that children's reading enjoyment levels have declined, across all social grades. We will continue to engage with the sector on this important issue.

■ Schools: Dartford

Jim Dickson:

[\[19173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Office for National Statistics web page entitled How the population changed in Dartford: Census 2021, published on 28 June 2022, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for school funding of the recent growth in the population of Dartford constituency; and if she will take steps to reflect the growth in Dartford's population in future school funding allocations.

Catherine McKinnell:

The schools national funding formula (NFF) distributes core funding for 5 to 16-year-old pupils in mainstream state-funded schools in England.

The vast majority of funding is allocated based on pupil numbers and characteristics. This means that, where pupil numbers are increasing, local authorities and schools will see a commensurate increase in school funding the following year.

In addition to funding through the pupil-led factors in the NFF, the department also allocates growth funding to local authorities. Local authorities can use this funding to support schools experiencing significant growth in pupil numbers, until the lagged funding system catches up.

■ Schools: Transport

Laura Trott:

[\[19397\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of the potential impact of the planned increase in employer National Insurance on the cost of home-to-school transport.

Catherine McKinnell:

At the Autumn Budget 2024, my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer took difficult decisions in order to restore economic and fiscal stability, which included increasing Employer National Insurance Contributions from April 2025. Working people's living standards were protected by raising the National Living Wage, keeping bus fares down, and not increasing income tax, employee national insurance or VAT.

Local authorities are responsible for arranging home-to-school transport and deliver this through both in-house services and a range of external providers, as such the department holds no central assessment of Employer National Insurance Contributions. Departmental officials engage regularly with local authorities to understand the challenges they face across the services they deliver.

Teachers: Termination of Employment**Rupert Lowe:****[18453]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many teachers have had their employment terminated, broken down by reason, for each year in the last five years.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

The attached table provides details of the reported reason teacher contracts were terminated in the 2018/19 to 2022/23 academic years, which reflects the latest data available.

Teachers may have more than one contract, therefore individuals may be counted more than once. Figures for 'Other reasons' includes teachers who had a change of contract but remained at the school. Figures differ to the published number of teachers leaving service, which are based on the full-time equivalent number of qualified teachers who are not employed in a state-funded school the following year.

Attachments:

1. [18453 Attachment Teacher Contract Terminations](#)
[18453_Teacher_Contract_Terminations.xlsx]

Teaching Methods: Complaints**Rupert Lowe:****[18456]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many complaints have been received by Ofsted from parents on teaching practices in schools in each of the last five years broken down by reason.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Biomethane

Josh Newbury: [\[19094\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans his Department has to use biomethane generated from mandatory food waste collections from 2026-27 for (a) injection into the gas grid and (b) combustion for electricity generation.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Green Gas Support Scheme (GGSS) provides tariff-support for biomethane produced via anaerobic digestion (AD) and injected into the gas grid. It is expected to contribute 10.7MTCO₂e of carbon savings over its lifetime.

The GGSS requires that at least 50% of all biomethane, by energy content, is produced using waste feedstocks. In England, we expect that food waste collected due to Simpler Recycling reforms will constitute a significant portion of AD feedstocks.

Food waste can also be used in AD Combined Heat and Power systems to produce electricity, with support provided through a number of the Department's renewable electricity schemes.

Josh Newbury: [\[19095\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to support the production of biomethane on farms using organic waste.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Green Gas Support Scheme (GGSS) provides tariff-support for biomethane produced via anaerobic digestion (AD) and injected into the gas grid. It is expected to contribute 10.7MTCO₂e of carbon savings over its lifetime.

The GGSS requires that at least 50% of all biomethane, by energy content, is produced using waste feedstocks, which includes agricultural wastes.

The GGSS will close to new applicants on 31 March 2028. To follow this, the Government is developing a holistic policy framework to support the growth of the biomethane sector. The new framework includes consideration to the role of AD in treating agricultural wastes.

■ British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme

Melanie Ward: [\[18468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, when Ministers next plan to meet trustees of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme.

Sarah Jones:

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

■ Drax Power Station: Subsidies**Alex Sobel:****[18603]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, If he will delay announcing subsidy decisions on Drax until after he has received Ofgem's report on the compliance of Drax with sustainability rules during the last financial year.

Michael Shanks:

The Government only supports sustainable biomass and generators only receive subsidies for biomass that complies with our criteria.

The results of Ofgem's investigation into Drax's compliance with biomass sustainability criteria was published in August 2024 and can be found here, <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/ofgem-decision-investigation-drax-power-limited>). Ofgem found that whilst Drax complied with sustainability standards, it had failed to report data accurately. Drax's misreporting is a serious matter and Government expects full compliance with all regulatory obligations. Drax's £25 million redress payment underscores the robustness of the regulatory system. No decision has been taken as to whether transitional support arrangements will be introduced for relevant biomass generators when their current subsidies end.

■ Electricity Generation**Nick Timothy:****[18691]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he is taking steps with the National Energy System Operator to increase demand flexibility in the electricity system by four to five times the current level by 2030.

Michael Shanks:

NESO's Clean Power 2030 Report demonstrates that clean power is achievable under a number of pathways. We have now published the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan setting out capacity ranges for different technologies in the government's indicative 2030 clean power pathway. The Action Plan also highlights a number of actions that government, Ofgem and NESO are taking to support greater energy system flexibility in line with the pathway, including from consumer-led flexibility.

■ Energy: Meters**Brendan O'Hara:****[19323]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will made an assessment of the potential merits of changing the Smart Energy Code licence restrictions to allow companies setting up smart meter connections for energy consumers to use the Cellular Network when the Radio Frequency Network is unavailable.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Under its licence, the Data Communication Company (DCC) is obligated to provide Wide Area Network (WAN) coverage to at least 99.5% of premises across its 'North' region.

DCC is currently taking forward its strategy for ongoing communications in the North and is considering a full range of technical solutions.

Once the DCC has determined its future strategy the Department will support necessary changes being made to the Smart Energy Code.

■ **Energy: Small Businesses**

Luke Taylor: **[19493]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to help small and medium high street businesses manage energy costs in Sutton and Cheam constituency.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Wholesale energy costs have decreased for non-domestic consumers since the global energy crisis, but we recognise that some businesses may be struggling to pay their bills.

The Government believes that the only way to protect billpayers permanently, including small and medium sized enterprises, is to speed up the transition away from fossil fuels and towards homegrown clean energy. The creation of Great British Energy will help us to harness clean energy and have less reliance on volatile international energy markets and help in our commitment to make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030.

For non-domestic consumers who agreed to contracts at very expensive rates at the peak of price spikes, they can contact their supplier to enquire about 'blend and extend' contracts. These contracts blend the original, higher, unit rate with a new lower rate, spreading the cost over the course of an extended contract lifetime.

■ **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

George Freeman: **[R] [18927]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans he has for the data collected by the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measurement and Modelling Advancement (GEMMA) programme; and if he will make it his policy to integrate that data into greenhouse gas emissions statistics.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Government monitors and verifies greenhouse gas emissions using measurement data collected through a network of sensors across the country. The Department is working closely with the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measurement and Modelling Advancement (GEMMA) programme to consider how measurements

from this programme could be incorporated into its greenhouse gas inventory verification programme database.

■ **Liquefied Natural Gas: Imports**

Andrew Bowie:

[\[18590\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate his Department has made of the requirement for imported Liquefied Natural Gas in each year between 2025 and 2030.

Michael Shanks:

We expect UK gas demand to continue declining as we make Britain a clean energy superpower and accelerate to net zero. While the Department routinely assesses a range of factors that could impact future energy security, we do not hold departmental estimates on required volumes of imported LNG between 2025 and 2030.

■ **National Energy System Operator**

Nick Timothy:

[\[18690\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions (a) Ministers, (b) special advisors, and (c) officials in his Department had with the National Energy System Operator on modelling assumptions in the Clean Power 2030 report.

Michael Shanks:

NESO is operationally independent from Government and decisions relating to modelling assumptions are not made by the Department. Earlier this year the Government commissioned the National Energy System Operator (NESO) to provide independent advice on achieving a zero-carbon electricity system by 2030. NESO consulted publicly in September and October on its approach and assumptions. The Government continues to engage with NESO and other key stakeholders in developing our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan.

■ **National Grid**

Nick Timothy:

[\[18692\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking with the National Energy System Operator to increase transmission network capacity by 2030.

Nick Timothy:

[\[18695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to reduce curtailment payments.

Michael Shanks:

As set out in our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, and in line with the National Energy System Operator's advice published in November, the Government is working to develop the necessary grid infrastructure and manage the level of constraints to create a cheaper and secure energy system for Britain. The Government is working

with Ofgem, the National Energy System Operator, and the transmission owners to ensure accelerated delivery of critical projects, including through reforms to the planning system, unlocking supply chains and mobilising the investment and streamlining regulatory processes.

Nick Timothy:

[\[18694\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to minimise delays in constructing new grid connections.

Michael Shanks:

Accelerating connections is mission-critical for Government as we seek to meet our Clean Power 2030 ambition and drive economic growth. As set out in our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, Government is working with Ofgem, National Energy System Operator and network companies to reform the connections process to ensure that viable projects, that meet our strategic needs, can connect in time.

■ **National Grid: Norfolk and Tilbury**

Nick Timothy:

[\[18693\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to construct grid connections for (a) Norfolk and (b) Tilbury.

Michael Shanks:

The Transmission Owner National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) is responsible for constructing the electricity transmission network in England and Wales, including for Norfolk and Tilbury. The Government is working with delivery stakeholders, including NGET, to ensure accelerated delivery of the critical grid infrastructure, including both new lines and upgrades to existing lines, needed for a cheaper and secure energy system, in line with our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan. This includes both new infrastructure and upgrades to existing lines.

■ **North Lincolnshire Green Energy Park**

Andrew Bowie:

[\[18592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to construct grid connections for North Lincolnshire Energy Park.

Michael Shanks:

Northern Powergrid (NPg) and National Grid Electricity Transmission are responsible for the construction of the connections. I understand from NPg that the connection infrastructure is expected to be completed in 2027. Energisation dates will be specific to each customer in the energy park.

■ **Pylons: South Holland and The Deepings**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[18494\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he meet with National Grid to discuss the potential cost to the public purse from compensation for loss of

property value as a result of proposed pylons installations in South Holland and The Deepings constituency.

Michael Shanks:

National Grid, as the relevant transmission licence holder, is required to compensate landowners who agree to site electrical infrastructure on their land. This cost is paid for by National Grid, it does not come from government expenditure. As such it would not be appropriate for government to get involved in negotiations about compensation payments awarded to parties affected by specific infrastructure projects.

■ **Remote Sensing: Environment**

George Freeman:

[R] [\[18533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans he has for the use of Earth observation data; and whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of using it to support the (a) measurement, (b) monitoring and (c) setting of UK net zero emissions targets.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Government monitors and verifies greenhouse gas emissions using measurement data collected through a network of sensors across the country. The UK is one of only four countries in the world currently reporting the validation of greenhouse gas emissions based on Earth Observation measurements.

The Department regularly considers developments in Earth Observation technology and their potential application through a dedicated Inventory Improvement Programme.

■ **Solar Events: Research**

Dr Ben Spencer:

[\[18660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he plans to produce a domestic research strategy for space weather.

Michael Shanks:

Work continues to progress the UK Severe Space Weather Preparedness Strategy which was published in September 2021.

The Strategy was developed in close collaboration with the academic community and commits to a series of targeted research and development activities. This is currently being delivered through the Space Weather Innovation, Measurement, Modelling and Risk (SWIMMR) programme.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Anaerobic Digestion

Josh Newbury: [\[19092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the capacity of anaerobic digestion facilities, in the context of the planned introduction of mandatory food waste collections in 2026-27.

Mary Creagh:

The Government's preference is for unavoidable food waste to be collected for treatment by anaerobic digestion (AD): producing bio-gas and digestate.

Defra has been working with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to estimate AD capacity in England. Based on current estimates, there will be sufficient AD capacity in England to treat the increased tonnage of food waste expected to be collected once Simpler Recycling's mandatory food waste collection requirements commence between 2025-2027. Defra intends to publish a Recycling Infrastructure Capacity Analysis soon. This will set out anticipated waste volumes to 2035, mapping this modelling against known waste management infrastructure for various waste streams, including food waste. The analysis will signal where there is likely over or under-provision of waste management capacity.

DESNZ's Green Gas Support Scheme (GGSS) provides tariff-support for biomethane produced via AD and injected into the gas grid, supporting investment in AD plants. Under the GGSS, at least 50% of all biomethane by energy content must be produced using waste or residue feedstock. In England, we expect that food waste collected due to Simpler Recycling reforms will constitute a significant portion of AD feedstocks.

■ Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal

Josh Newbury: [\[R\] \[19093\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support waste collection authorities to deliver mandatory household food waste collections from 2026-27.

Mary Creagh:

To support waste collection authorities to deliver household food waste collections, we provided capital transitional funding in February 2024 to cover reasonable costs of purchasing trucks and bins needed to deliver weekly food waste collections from 31 March 2026.

We are preparing to deliver transitional resource new burdens funding to local authorities for weekly food waste collections for households in two batches, one in early 2025 and the other in spring 2025.

Funding for ongoing resource funding from 1 April 2026 is subject to agreement through a spending review and we will confirm details when we can.

We are also working with sector specialists WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) to provide guidance on best practice and scope additional areas of support.

■ Environment Protection: Business

Stephen Gethins:

[18559]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of existing environmental adaptation measures in helping businesses build resilience to climate-related disasters.

Emma Hardy:

The Climate Change Act 2008 requires the Secretary of State to produce a National Adaptation Programme in response to the Government's most recent Climate Change Risk Assessment, on a five-yearly cycle. The third National Adaptation Programme, published in July 2023, includes actions to address climate change risks to businesses through a combination of investment in resilience measures to tackle flooding and coastal erosion risks, evidence gathering (including annual business survey questions), business engagement and nature-based solutions. The Climate Change Committee provides a biennial assessment of progress in adapting to climate change. The next progress report, assessing the actions taken under the third National Adaptation Programme, is due in 2025. Alongside delivering the third National Adaptation Programme, Defra is committed to further strengthening this government's approach to climate resilience and will bring forward plans in due course.

■ Flood Control: Finance

Robbie Moore:

[18412]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he will continue to provide £25 million for the Natural Flood Management Fund.

Emma Hardy:

This Government is investing £2.4 billion over this year and next year to improve flood resilience by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences. The list of projects to receive Government funding for 2025-26 will be consented over the coming months in the usual way through Regional Flood and Coastal Committees, with local representation.

The breakdown of Government investment from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 in £ millions is published online at [Flood and coastal erosion risk management report: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#). The breakdown from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 will be published in due course.

■ Food: Waste

Ian Roome: [\[17660\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to mandate food waste reporting.

Mary Creagh:

The Government is committed to setting a clear roadmap to a circular economy – a future where our resources are used as efficiently and productively as possible for as long as possible, and waste is reduced. Defra is reviewing policies to address the challenges associated with tackling food waste in the supply chain.

■ Houseboats

John McDonnell: [\[18482\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to prevent boat dwellers without a permanent mooring from (a) having their homes seized and (b) being financially penalised in enforcement action by (i) the Canal and River Trust and (ii) other navigation authorities.

Emma Hardy:

All navigation authorities in England and Wales are responsible for operational matters on their waterways, including setting fees and charges for those using them and the use of corresponding enforcement powers, under the relevant statutory provisions. The Government does not have a role in that but recognises that boaters using navigable waterways require a valid licence from the relevant navigation authority and are expected to comply with the terms of their licences for the benefit of all waterway users. The Government is assured that appropriate enforcement action is only used as a last resort in response to persistent non-compliance, to ensure fairness to all boaters who do comply. We also understand that the Canal and River Trust provides a variety of support routes to boaters experiencing difficulties with licence fees or compliance with navigation requirements.

■ Meat: Ritual Slaughter

Gregory Stafford: [\[18843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that halal products are clearly marked on food labelling.

Daniel Zeichner:

There are no regulations that require the labelling of halal meat, but where any information of this nature is provided it must be accurate and must not be misleading to the consumer. The Government respects religious freedoms and expects the industry, whether food producer or food outlet, to provide consumers with all the information they need to make informed choices.

■ Milk**Helen Morgan:**[\[19087\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 17283 on Milk, how farmers are able to contribute to the engagement process.

Daniel Zeichner:

We value input from farmers to inform our plans and appreciate their contribution to ongoing dialogue. Individual farmers are encouraged to engage with the process primarily through their representative groups, with whom we conduct regular discussions, and who serve as an effective channel for collective feedback.

■ Sewage: Coastal Areas**Edward Morello:**[\[19203\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an assessment of (a) the potential merits of compensating coastal communities disproportionately affected by sewage discharges for the environmental and economic damage caused and (b) whether such compensation could be funded through the water company regulatory framework.

Emma Hardy:

Ofwat, the independent economic regulator, sets specific performance targets for companies in the five-yearly price review. Where companies fail to meet these targets, including pollution incidents, they must reimburse customers through lower water bills.

Additionally, under new proposals set out by this government on the Guaranteed Standards Scheme, households and businesses will be entitled to higher payments from water companies when basic services are not met. This includes payments for incidents of internal and external sewer flooding to a customer's property.

On 23 October, the Secretary of State and the Welsh Government launched an Independent Commission into the water sector and its regulation, in what is expected to form the largest review of the industry since privatisation. These recommendations will form the basis of further legislation to attract long-term investment and clean up our waters for good.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Bangladesh: Hinduism****Bob Blackman:**[\[18519\]](#)

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 (a) historical reports and (b) recent reports of increased violence and persecution against Indian Hindus in Bangladesh.

Catherine West:

The UK has a long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). Following the student-led protests in July and August, we have been closely monitoring the situation for minorities in Bangladesh. In November, I visited Bangladesh and discussed the importance of the protection of religious minorities, including the Hindu community, with Chief Adviser Yunus. We are providing up to £27 million under the Bangladesh Collaborative, Accountable and Peaceful Politics programme for protecting civic and political space, fostering collaboration, reducing corruption, and mitigating tensions that lead to violence. We will continue to engage with the Interim Government of Bangladesh on the importance of FoRB.

■ **British Council: Finance**

Stephen Gethins: [\[17818\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure that the British Council has adequate funding to effectively promote (a) Scottish and (b) wider UK (i) education and (ii) arts.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

As an Arms Length Body, the British Council is operationally independent. They set out their plans in their Annual Corporate Plan. The Government is committed to a successful British Council that is financially stable. Our funding to the British Council underlines our support. FCDO will provide the British Council with £162.5 million Grant-in-Aid in 2024/25. Funding for 2025/26 will be announced in due course.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory**

Mr Richard Holden: [\[18207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will publish the (a) environmental principles and (b) equalities impact assessment for the Chagos Islands handover decision.

Stephen Doughty:

HM Government recognises the importance of environmental and equalities considerations in the context of the BIOT Sovereignty agreement. Both parties have committed to ensuring that all aspects of the sovereignty transfer align with international legal standards including on environmental protection, as well as considerations of equality and inclusivity where relevant. Relevant assessments will be managed in line with standard protocols.

■ **British Indian Ocean Territory: Chagossians**

Priti Patel: [\[18365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will list the meetings (a) he and his Ministers and (b) officials have had with representatives of the Chagossian community since 5 July 2024.

Stephen Doughty:

I met members of the Chagossian community on 30 September and 3 October. Officials are also in regular contact with Chagossians on a range of issues. There are a large number of Chagossian groups with a spectrum of views. We will continue efforts to engage all groups or representatives with an interest.

Chinese Embassy: Greater London**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with Councillor Abdal Ullah of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets on the call-in of the planning application of the proposed Chinese Embassy in London.

Catherine West:

The Foreign Secretary has not had any discussions with Councillor Abdal Ullah on the call in of the planning application of the proposed Chinese Embassy at the Royal Mint Court.

Developing Countries: Renewable Energy**Stephen Gethins:**[\[18558\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help to low-income countries pursue green industrialisation pathways.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK Government is committed to helping low income countries pursue green industrialisation pathways by promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development, and supporting industrial decarbonisation.

Examples include raising over £470 million of investment through Manufacturing Africa in Rwanda and Ethiopia, £7 million investment by British International Investment in Planet Solar, using solar power to increase Sierra Leone's power supply by 30%, and support to the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative.

Development Aid**Priti Patel:**[\[18364\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what cash levels of Official Development Assistance he plans to provide in each of the next five financial years.

Anneliese Dodds:

Our mission is to build partnerships to help create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet. The UK's development spending is central to achieving this mission.

The FCDO's planned Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme budget, including the Integrated Security Fund, is £8.78 billion in 2024/25. This is planned to increase by £450 million in 2025/26 to £9.24 billion, the highest level in recent years.

The second phase of the Spending Review, concluding in late spring 2025, will set departmental ODA budgets for future years.

■ Development Aid: Abortion

Sir John Hayes: [\[18490\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an estimate of the amount of overseas development assistance funds that have been spent on providing abortion services in the last five years.

Anneliese Dodds:

We report spend in line with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development and Assistance Committee sector codes which do not track spend specifically for abortion services which are part of a wider package of women's healthcare. FCDO support to safe abortion services is within what is permitted by national laws, as well as providing life-saving treatment for women who have had unsafe abortions.

The FCDO annually reports on Official Development Assistance (ODA) expenditure via the Statistics on International Development publications [<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-international-development>]. All of our programmatic spend data can be found on the Devtracker website [<https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/>].

■ Development Aid: Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon: [\[18545\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of aid provided by his Department's Freedom of Religion or Belief programme in financial year 2024-25.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK remains strongly committed to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all abroad. It is our firm opinion that no one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We are championing the right to FoRB and promoting tolerance and mutual respect through our engagement in multilateral fora, our bilateral work, and our programme funding. The FCDO John Bunyan Fund, the designated programme for FoRB-focused overseas projects, has a budget allocation of £460,720 in FY24/25. More broadly, the FCDO works to ensure that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is allocated to those who are most vulnerable and most in need of this assistance irrespective of race, religion, or ethnicity. This includes minority religious or belief communities, who are assessed by our partners when determining those most in need of protection and assistance.

■ Diplomatic Service: Disability

Ben Coleman:

[18310]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many times UK ambassadors have met Organisations of Persons with Disabilities in the past year.

Anneliese Dodds:

We do not collect data on the engagement with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) across the FCDO network of overseas Posts. However, Posts are encouraged to promote all equalities issues globally, including disability inclusion, and engage directly with OPDs regularly. Since the merger of FCO and DFID, a substantial new programme of capability building on how to do this has been established, including a 'how to note' on engaging with OPDs specifically.

Engagement is increasing but the FCDO has further to go. Recent examples include the Ambassador in Jakarta's meetings with OPDs and disability inclusion partners on at least four occasions over the last year; and the High Commissioner in Rwanda's meeting with a group of local OPD representatives to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities earlier this month.

The Minister for Development has also included meetings with OPDs where possible during her travel schedule, including meeting an organisation of women with disabilities in South Sudan, and visiting OPDs in South Sulawesi, Indonesia who are receiving technical assistance from the FCDO's Disability Capacity Building Programme.

We will launch a refreshed version of the FCDO's Inclusion and Rights Strategy at the Global Disability Summit in Berlin in April 2025. The voices and agency of people with disabilities will remain a core focus of the strategy and of our wider work on disability inclusion.

■ English Language: Assessments

Stephen Gethins:

[17819]

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of proposed changes to Home Office English Language Testing services on the British Council's (a) finances and (b) ability to promote Scottish (i) further and (ii) higher education overseas.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

My officials will follow up with the British Council on *these points*. The British Council is operationally independent from Government; its priorities, programmes and operations are approved by its Board of Trustees.

■ **Foreign Relations**

Mr Joshua Reynolds: [\[18839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what his definition is of progressive realism; and what steps he is taking to implement a progressive realist foreign policy.

Anneliese Dodds:

In his article in *Foreign Affairs* (April 2024), the Foreign Secretary defined progressive realism as "using realist means to pursue progressive ends". He is clear that this approach will underpin FCDO policies and will require using all the tools at our disposal: economic, diplomatic and societal. In his Kew speech (September 2024), he set out what this means in the specific context of the climate crisis - engaging collaboratively to deliver an ambitious COP29 agreement as we did ensuring genuine partnerships are at the cornerstone of our foreign policy.

■ **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Contracts**

Priti Patel: [\[18363\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what third party contracts are scheduled for commissioning from 2025/26; and what estimate he has made of the value of each such contract.

Catherine West:

The FCDO publishes a bi-annual pipeline of projects and the most recent one was in October 2024, available here: [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fcdo-commercial-pipeline-october-2024>]

■ **Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**

Emily Thornberry: [\[18904\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Catherine West:

Government Procurement Cards provide an efficient route to enable key staff to procure goods and services, necessary to the promotion of British interests overseas and the maintenance of our embassies and high commissions. All purchases are subject to authorisation by managers and audit checks.

The FCDO publishes £500+ spend on gov.uk, and the monthly breakdown can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fcdo-spending-over-500>.

With regards to sub-£500 spend, the total for 2022 is £13,434,713, and for 2023 is £15,106,232. To note, the total value of refunds in the period has been deducted from the total value of purchases in the period in the data presented; some refunds may relate to purchases in the previous period.

■ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: Ethnic Groups

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18743\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make it his policy that (a) internships and (b) jobs in (i) his Department and (ii) all non-ministerial bodies are open to applicants of all ethnic backgrounds.

Catherine West:

The FCDO is committed to being a truly inclusive employer, with a workforce that reflects the diversity of the diverse population we serve. We encourage applications from people of all ethnic backgrounds and indeed all backgrounds for all our schemes and positions.

■ Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Wendy Morton:

[\[16924\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to identify any potential additional routes for humanitarian aid delivery into Gaza since July 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK continues to call on Israel to increase humanitarian and commercial access into the Palestinian territories by ensuring all aid crossings are fully operational. This is particularly vital in the winter months as heavy rain and flooding are now exacerbating an already desperate humanitarian situation. We are clear that Israel can and must do more to get aid into Gaza. The Prime Minister stressed this in a call with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on 19 October; and the Foreign Secretary reiterated this at the UN Security Council on 18 November. Israel must streamline processes at Ashdod, increase the flow of aid from Jordan and Egypt, and allow the commercial import of goods from Israel, the West Bank and neighbouring countries.

■ Humanitarian Aid: Finance

Kate Osamor:

[\[18583\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure that humanitarian funding is allocated based on assessed needs.

Anneliese Dodds:

The FCDO is committed to being a principled humanitarian donor, prioritising humanitarian assistance to people in greatest need by using data and evidence to guide allocation decisions.

We have announced a doubling of support for people hit by the humanitarian emergency in Sudan, as well as providing support for people in Gaza, in Lebanon and in other crisis situations.

■ **International Criminal Court: Arrest Warrants**

Apsana Begum: [\[15782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to his European counterparts on steps to help implement the arrest warrant for (a) Benjamin Netanyahu, (b) Yoav Gallant and (c) Mohammed Deif issued by the International Criminal Court on 21 November 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We respect the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern. It is for all ICC States Parties to consider how to meet their obligations under the Rome Statute, including on cooperation with the Court. The Government engages with other States Parties on such matters via the ICC Assembly of States Parties.

Apsana Begum: [\[15783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to the incoming United States Administration on steps to help implement the arrest warrant for (a) Benjamin Netanyahu, (b) Yoav Gallant and (c) Mohammed Deif issued by the International Criminal Court on 21 November 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We respect the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern. The UK is a State Party to the Rome Statute, and we will always comply with our legal obligations. The Government will engage with the current and incoming US Administration on all our priorities.

■ **Iran: Sanctions**

Wendy Morton: [\[16925\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of UK sanctions on Iran.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We judge UK sanctions to be an important tool in deterring and disrupting Iran's malign activity and demonstrating that, alongside our international partners, the UK condemns Iran's threats to international security and its human rights violations. Since September, the UK has announced four sanctions packages to counter Iranian activity, including coordinated international responses to both Iran's 1 October attack against Israel, and its transfer of ballistic missiles to Russia. Furthermore, on 13 September, the UK also expanded its trade sanctions to cover further goods which play an important role in Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle and missile programmes.

■ Lebanon: Aid Workers

Wendy Morton:

[\[16929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure the safety of UK humanitarian workers in Lebanon.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Any British national in Lebanon, regardless of the purpose of their stay, is entitled to consular support from the British Embassy. We provide detailed and up-to-date travel advice on gov.uk, which gives useful information for British Nationals to inform their personal security arrangements.

The UK funds a humanitarian programme in Lebanon and while we do not assume duty of care for our implementing partners, we perform due diligence to understand their security arrangements. There is explicit criteria in grant or commercial contracts which outline HMG's expectations of suppliers in terms of duty of care and security provision for their staff, for example regarding safety briefings and risk mitigation plans.

We urge all parties involved in the conflict in Lebanon to allow humanitarian workers to carry out their work safely, and we continue to do so even with the ceasefire in place. More broadly, the FCDO supports the safety of humanitarian workers by investing in protective measures that our partners need to work safely, championing international humanitarian law, and using UK seats at key multilateral fora to raise awareness and promote accountability. The UK was proud to co-sponsor and vote in favour of UN Security Council resolution 2730, which calls on states to protect humanitarian personnel, and we support its full implementation in Lebanon and around the world.

■ Lebanon: Humanitarian Aid

Wendy Morton:

[\[16955\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in (a) Lebanon and (b) the Middle East on ensuring that aid can be brought into Lebanon.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK continues to engage with international partners on alleviating the suffering of those most in need in Lebanon, including refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities. I attended the International Conference in Support of Lebanon's People and Sovereignty in Paris on 24 October, where approximately €800 million in humanitarian support was committed. I met Lebanon's Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib and Environment Minister Nasser Yasin to discuss the situation, as well as other regional and international counterparts. The UK is one of the largest donors to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Lebanon Humanitarian Fund and the Central Emergency Response Fund. We have announced £10 million of aid to Lebanon, which includes essential medicine, hygiene kits, fuel for water stations, education and child protection services for the most

vulnerable children, and cash assistance. This is in addition to the £5 million already provided to support emergency response programming. UK bilateral humanitarian support for this financial year so far is £31 million.

■ Mozambique: Humanitarian Situation and Religious Freedom

Sir Julian Lewis: [\[19219\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Mozambique on (a) violence perpetrated against Christians by Islamic extremists in Cabo Delgado and (b) the effectiveness of the steps Mozambique is taking to tackle the humanitarian and security situation in that region, in the context of its freedom of religion and belief obligations.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is committed to working multilaterally and bilaterally to defend Freedom of Religion or Belief around the world. In Mozambique, the UK regularly engages with authorities and religious leaders both in the capital (Maputo) and northern Mozambique (Cabo Delgado and Nampula) to address the problems of violence and to tackle the ongoing humanitarian crisis, including several times this year. The UK is supporting efforts to counter the ongoing IS-Mozambique insurgency in Cabo Delgado, through programmes aimed at building local resilience to violent extremism and security and human rights training of Mozambican Armed Forces, as well providing humanitarian assistance to those displaced. Ongoing challenges for religious communities remain, as Christian and Muslim places of worship continue to be affected.

■ Myanmar: Development Aid

Fabian Hamilton: [\[18349\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of the (a) national unity government and (b) ethnic revolutionary organisations in Myanmar on the delivery of aid to people most in need.

Catherine West:

We continue to discuss the humanitarian situation and the delivery of aid in Myanmar with a range of opposition stakeholders, including the National Unity Government (NUG) and a number of Ethnic Resistance Organisations (ERO). Since the coup, the UK has provided more than £150 million in life-saving humanitarian assistance, emergency healthcare and education support, and we continue to support civil society and local communities on the ground. The UK is committed to supporting a plurality of voices in Myanmar, and we are clear that any future settlement for Myanmar must be inclusive and involve a wide range of opposition actors, including EROs and the NUG. The Myanmar military must engage with them and all other opposition groups.

■ Pakistan: Diplomatic Relations

Luke Taylor:

[\[17034\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to help protect the rights of minority groups in Pakistan.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We work to protect and promote human rights in Pakistan through our diplomatic engagement and programme funding. I (Minister Falconer) underlined the importance of promoting religious tolerance and harmony when I met with Pakistan's Human Rights Minister Azam Tarar on 19 November. On 20 November, I attended a meeting with Pakistan's Minister of Interior Mosin Naqvi, where the British High Commissioner and I raised concerns about threats of violence directed towards Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan. The UK will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all people as laid down in Pakistan's Constitution and in accordance with international standards.

■ Russia: Diplomatic Relations

Wendy Morton:

[\[17121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the (a) expulsion of a UK diplomat by Russia and (b) travel bans issued by Russia on UK officials and Ministers.

Stephen Doughty:

The UK condemns harassment of diplomats in the strongest terms including the malicious and completely baseless accusations made against FCDO staff in Russia. We do not comment on specific Russian travel bans. No Minister will be visiting Russia in the current circumstances of their egregious actions not least their continued barbarous and illegal war against Ukraine.

■ Sanctions

Alex Sobel:

[\[18175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of allocating confiscated proceeds from (a) sanctions breaches and (b) penalties for (i) human rights and (ii) humanitarian law violations towards reparations for victims.

Stephen Doughty:

His Majesty's Government is committed to clamping down on sanctions offenders and takes action in all cases where it is appropriate to do so. Fines issued for breaching sanctions are absorbed into HMG's overall budget. The Government assesses that it is for competent courts to judge whether we should allocate confiscated proceeds from penalties for human rights and humanitarian law violations reparations for victims. The International Criminal Court is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern,

holding perpetrators to account and achieving justice for victims - including through reparations.

The UK also remains committed to supporting Ukraine. This Government is clear that Russia must pay for the damage it has caused and will continue to consider all lawful ways to hold Russia to this obligation.

■ Taliban: Medicine

Tonia Antoniazzi: [\[17860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the Taliban's decision to (a) ban women from medical training and (b) prohibit male medics from treating female patients.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK is deeply concerned at reports of a ban on women accessing medical training in Afghanistan. We strongly condemn this and urge the Taliban to reverse this decision. Female health workers are critical to treating women-focused health issues such as reproductive health. These decisions are yet another affront to girls' right to education and will threaten the lives of countless women and girls who will be denied critical medical care, as well as their future children. Our ongoing support to those Afghans most in need is more essential than ever, and we remain committed that at least 50% of those reached by UK aid are women and girls.

■ Tibet: Buddhism

Alex Easton: [\[19179\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the security of Buddhists in Tibet in (a) November and (b) December 2024.

Catherine West:

This Government stands firm on human rights, including China's repression of the people of Tibet. We will champion freedom of religion or belief for all abroad, and work to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief through the UN, G7 and other multilateral fora, and through bilateral engagement.

We continue to coordinate efforts with our international partners to hold China to account for human rights violations, for example, joining a statement led by Australia on Xinjiang and Tibet at the UN General Assembly on 22 October. The Foreign Secretary has raised human rights in every meeting with his Chinese counterpart Foreign Minister Wang Yi, including during his recent visit to China on 18 October.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Mental Health

Chris Webb:

[18236]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the Government plans to review the impact of alcohol on mental health..

Stephen Kinnock:

The Suicide Prevention Strategy for England, published in September 2023, identifies substance misuse, including alcohol, as a key common risk factor for action, and we will explore opportunities to go further. The negative impact that alcohol can have on mental health is also acknowledged and highlighted on the NHS England website, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/the-risks-of-drinking-too-much/>

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse

Cat Smith:

[19327]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to tackle alcohol harms.

Cat Smith:

[19328]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Health Mission Board has taken to tackle rates of alcohol harm.

Andrew Gwynne:

Under our Health Mission, the Government is committed to prioritising preventative public health measures to support people to live longer, healthier lives. For too long there has been an unwillingness to lead on issues like smoking, alcohol harm, and obesity. It is unacceptable that alcohol deaths are now at record high levels. The Department will continue to work across Government to understand how we can best reduce alcohol-related harms.

■ Alcoholism: Death

Cat Smith:

[19324]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will meet the Alcohol Health Alliance to discuss what steps the Government can take to reduce alcohol related deaths.

Cat Smith:

[19325]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to meet (a) the Alcohol Health Alliance and (b) other public health representatives to discuss rates of alcohol harm.

Andrew Gwynne:

Under our Health Mission, the Government is committed to prioritising preventative public health measures to support people to live longer, healthier lives. For too long there has been an unwillingness to lead on issues like smoking, alcohol harm, and obesity. It is unacceptable that alcohol deaths are now at record high levels. I can confirm that Department ministers plan to meet representatives from the Alcohol Health Alliance in the new year.

■ **Antenatal Care**

Helen Hayes: [\[18571\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent guidance his Department has issued to NHS Foundation Trusts on the provision of early pregnancy services (a) at weekends and (b) overnight.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 12 December 2024]: The Government is determined to make sure all women and babies receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care, particularly when things go wrong.

We will continue to work with NHS England to ensure that we listen to women and their families, and learn lessons from recent inquiries and investigations, including recommendations from the pregnancy loss review.

■ **Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Disorders: Knowsley**

Anneliese Midgley: [\[19101\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people are living with (a) arthritis and (b) musculoskeletal conditions in Knowsley constituency.

Andrew Gwynne:

In 2023/24, 1,261 people in Knowsley, or 0.9% of patients, aged 16 years old and over had rheumatoid arthritis recorded on the practice disease register. This data is from the Fingertips data collection and is based on Quality and Outcomes Framework, with further information available at the following link:

https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/msk/data#page/6/qid/1938133150/pat/6/par/E1200002/ati/501/are/E08000011/iid/91269/age/164/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/ine-vo-0_ine-yo-1:2023:-1:-1_ine-ct-163_ine-pt-0

Where local authority values are presented, these were calculated by assigning all patients of the general practice (GP) to the local authority where the GP is located.

We do not have data on the total number of people living with a musculoskeletal (MSK) condition in Knowsley. The count for MSK prevalence is not included in the Fingertips data collection, as the indicator is based on a survey. As such, the count would only reflect the survey sample, and not the population with MSK in any particular local authority. However, 24.6% of people aged 16 years old and over in

Knowsley reported a long-term MSK condition in 2023. Further information is available at the following link:

https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/msk/data#page/4/qid/1938133186/pat/6/par/E12000002/ati/501/are/E08000011/iid/93377/age/164/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/ine-vo-0_ine-yo-1:2023:-1:-1_ine-ct-163_ine-pt-0

This indicator is a self-reported prevalence from the GP Patient Survey, it is not a diagnosed prevalence rate. The definition of long term is a condition lasting or expected to last 12 months or more. Local authority prevalence is based on residential postcode.

■ Asthma: Medical Equipment

Mrs Sarah Russell: [\[17446\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many pressurised metered dose inhalers were prescribed by the NHS in the last year for which data is available.

Karin Smyth:

Information provided by the NHS Business Services Authority gives the quantities of each medicine dispensed in the community in England. The total number of pressurised inhalers that were dispensed in England from October 2023 to September 2024 was 42.3 million.

■ Blood Cancer: Diagnosis

Dr Simon Opher: [\[19461\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many blood cancer patients have been diagnosed via Non-Specific Symptom pathways in each of the last three years.

Dr Simon Opher: [\[19462\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish (a) the number of blood cancer patients diagnosed via Non-Specific Symptom pathways and (b) other data on the performance of such pathways.

Andrew Gwynne:

The capturing of non-specific symptom pathway outcomes was introduced in July 2023. From July 2023 to October 2024, 263 patients have been diagnosed via non-specific symptom pathways. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/supplementary-information/>

The National Disease Registration Service (NDRS), through the National Cancer Registration and Analysis Services, collects information on how many people in England have cancer.

Blood cancer is included as a distinct category in the NDRS, labelled haematological neoplasms. The NDRS' website also shows the number of people treated for different

tumour types by treatment type, as well as survival rates, mortality rates, and data on urgent suspected cancer referrals. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.cancerdata.nhs.uk/>

■ Blood Cancer: Health Services

Dr Simon Opher: **[19460]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will meet the Blood Cancer Alliance to discuss the need to include specific measures to improve blood cancer (a) diagnosis, (b) treatment and (c) care in the forthcoming cancer strategy.

Dr Simon Opher: **[19463]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if his Department will (a) introduce emergency presentation as a proxy staging measure for non-stageable blood cancers and (b) apply a corresponding national target to (i) measure and (ii) support reduction of late diagnosis of blood cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

There are no current plans to introduce a specific proxy staging measure or a corresponding national target to support the earlier diagnosis of blood cancers. To tackle late diagnoses of blood cancers, the National Health Service is implementing non-specific symptom pathways for patients who present with symptoms such as weight loss and fatigue, which do not clearly align to a tumour type. Blood cancers are one of the most common cancer types diagnosed through these pathways.

The National Disease Registration Service, through the National Cancer Registration and Analysis Services, collects information on how many people in England have blood cancer, labelled as haematological neoplasms. The National Disease Registration Service's website shows the number of people treated for different tumour types by treatment type, as well as survival rates, mortality rates, and data on urgent suspected cancer referrals. This data supports service provision and commissioning in the NHS, clinical audits, and public health and epidemiological research, all of which contributes to improved outcomes, including for blood cancer patients. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.cancerdata.nhs.uk/>

As part of the Government's five long-term missions, we have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the NHS and make it fit for the future. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed to move healthcare from hospital to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention, and will be co-designed with the public, staff, and patients. I would encourage you to engage via our online portal, which is available at the following link:

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

My Rt Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been clear that there should be a National Cancer Plan. We are now in discussions about what

form that plan should take, and what its relationship to the 10-Year Health Plan and the Government's wider Health Mission should be. We will provide updates on this in due course, including on how we plan to engage blood cancer partners.

I met with the Hon. Member for Poole and Blood Cancer UK, a member of the Blood Cancer Alliance, on 22 October 2024 to discuss the UK Blood Cancer Action Plan.

■ Blood: Donors

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[18641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the impact of blood donation rules on iron levels on the number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women unable to donate blood.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[18642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of blood donation rules on (a) iron levels in and (b) the adequacy of the supply of rare blood types commonly found in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: [\[18643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the minimum iron level required to donate blood.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) tests for haemoglobin levels rather than iron levels ahead of blood donation. If the test shows that the haemoglobin is low, the donor is deferred and information is provided on how they can increase haemoglobin levels through altering their diet, and book an appointment with their general practitioner if levels are particularly low. On average, 7% to 11% of donors are deferred because of low haemoglobin levels, but this rises to 12% of black heritage donors and to 25% of female black heritage donors. These deferrals impact on donor retention, as donors deferred for low haemoglobin are less likely to return.

Currently there are no plans to review minimum haemoglobin levels to donate blood. Donors whose haemoglobin levels are below safe levels to donate are deferred in accordance with the Blood Safety and Quality Regulations 2005 and the guidance issued by the Joint UK Blood Transfusion and Tissue Transplantation Services Professional Advisory Committee (JPAC) which states 'taking a donation from a person with a haemoglobin concentration below the recommended value may make them anaemic'.

Increasing diversity in the donor base is a priority for NHSBT, so they can provide matched blood for more patients, including those with rare blood types commonly found in black, Asian, and minority ethnic women. NHSBT provides grants to community and faith groups to encourage donation, including in black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities. The Department provided seed funding for NHSBT to

increase its collection capacity, particularly in diverse areas where higher proportions of the population have rare blood types, including Brixton and Brighton.

Navendu Mishra:

[18668]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help encourage more people to become blood donors in (a) Stockport constituency and (b) the North West.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) is responsible for blood donation in England. NHSBT runs marketing and partnership activity across England, including in Stockport, to encourage new donors to come forward. For example, on 11 November it launched a new campaign to ask the public to give the best gift this winter, to inspire people to fill the 100,000 vacant appointments in the run up to Christmas. It has also been working with the BBC on the Casualty Christmas Special, which will focus on blood stocks.

In addition, there are three NHSBT Community Grant projects based in the North West to promote blood donation, including a Caribbean and African Health Network, One Wirral Community Interest Company, and the community charity Become United. These focus on raising awareness in black heritage communities via events, webinars, videos, and web content.

■ Cancer: Drugs

Jim Shannon:

[18937]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has had recent discussions with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on its decision to not proceed with the approval of Durvalumab for recovering cancer patients.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has regular discussions with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) about a range of issues, including access to cancer treatments for National Health Service patients.

The NICE currently has a number of appraisals related to durvalumab in development or awaiting development, and has made no decision not to proceed with an appraisal of durvalumab related to recovering cancer patients.

Earlier this year, the NICE combined its appraisals of durvalumab for hepatocellular carcinoma at high risk of recurrence into a single appraisal. The NICE's guidance for this topic is currently awaiting development, and information regarding the timelines for this appraisal will be available at the earliest opportunity, on the NICE's website, at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/awaiting-development/gid-ta11222>

■ Cervical Cancer: Screening

Jim Dickson:

[19174]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to take steps to alter the messaging provided on cervical screening leaflets to make clear it does not screen for (a) ovarian cancer and (b) other gynaecological cancers.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England is responsible for delivering the NHS Cervical Screening Programme, and works to ensure that core public information on screening is easily accessible and understandable to the public. NHS England regularly reviews key public information across National Health Service screening programmes.

NHS England has advised that they are currently updating the Cervical screening: helping you decide leaflet, and that the draft update already addresses the concerns raised, making it clear that cervical screening does not screen for other cancers of the reproductive system. The final updated version is expected to be published in early 2025, and the current leaflet is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-description-in-brief/cervical-screening-helping-you-decide--2>

■ Chronic Illnesses

Julia Buckley:

[18761]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department will take steps to establish a cross-departmental long-term conditions taskforce to help (a) improve care for those with long-term conditions and (b) people back into work.

Julia Buckley:

[18762]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve data collection on the (a) prevalence and (b) impact on (i) public health and (ii) the NHS of long-term health conditions.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government wants a society where every person, including those with a long-term condition, and their families and carers, receives high-quality, compassionate continuity of care. We will change the National Health Service so that it becomes not just a sickness service, but one able to prevent ill health in the first place. This will help us be better prepared for the change in the nature of disease and allow our services to focus more on the management of chronic, long-term conditions.

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

We recognise that, in order to ensure the NHS is fit for the future, we must improve care for those with long-term conditions. One of the working groups supporting the development of the 10-Year Health Plan has been asked to develop a vision for how the NHS can evolve to provide responsive, joined-up care to better support individuals with complex health needs who may require frequent, ongoing engagement with the NHS. The group, chaired by Dr Claire Fuller and Caroline Abrahams CBE, will consider what improved care would look like for both individuals living with a single or multiple long-term conditions, including, for example, mental health conditions or disabilities, as well as individuals with multiple complex needs, including those that are frail or approaching the end of their life.

We know that appropriate work is generally good for health and wellbeing. We want everyone to get work and get on in work, whoever they are and wherever they live.

Disabled people and people with health conditions are a diverse group, so access to the right work and health support, in the right place, at the right time, is key.

The Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Work and Pensions are committed to supporting disabled people and people with health conditions, and have a range of support available so individuals can stay in work and get back into work, including those that join up employment and health systems. Measures include joining up health and employment support around the individual through Employment Advisors in NHS Talking Therapies and Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care, as well as support from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres and Access to Work grants.

As part of the Get Britain Working plan, the Government is launching Keep Britain Working, an independent review into the role of United Kingdom employers in reducing health-related inactivity, and to promote healthy and inclusive workplaces.

As ICBs are responsible for commissioning most services for people with long term conditions, most of the data regarding the prevalence of long-term health conditions is collected at the ICB level, although the 10-Year Health Plan will also be focussing on the improved use of data in the health system, as part of the shift from analogue to digital.

■ Continuing Care: Dorset

Sir Christopher Chope:

[18878]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether there is a maximum time within which applications for NHS Continuing Healthcare funding to NHS Dorset must be actioned; and whether redress is available to applicants whose applications have not been decided within 12 months.

Stephen Kinnock:

Statutory guidance and assurance regimes are in place in respect of NHS Continuing Healthcare (CHC) so that people are assessed and receive care in a timely way. NHS CHC guidance sets the expectation that the overall assessment and eligibility decision-making process should, in most cases, not exceed 28 calendar days from

when the integrated care board (ICB) receives a positive NHS CHC Checklist, or other notice of potential eligibility, to the eligibility decision being made. To support this, NHS England's assurance standard requires ICBs to ensure that in more than 80% of referrals for standard NHS CHC, the eligibility decision should be made within 28 days of this notification.

An individual should not be left without appropriate support while they await the outcome of the NHS CHC assessment and decision-making process. Redress is not available to applicants whose applications have not been decided within twelve months. If, however, an individual is unhappy with how their application has been handled, they can make a complaint to the relevant ICB. If an individual remains dissatisfied with the ICB's response, they can make a complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

■ **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

Calum Miller:

[19593]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of prioritising immunosuppressed children for eligibility of Covid-19 vaccinations.

Andrew Gwynne:

The independent Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advises the Department on the approach to vaccination and immunisation. In line with advice from the JCVI, individuals aged six months and over who are immunosuppressed are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination in the autumn 2024 programme.

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-jcvi-advice/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-in-2025-and-spring-2026>

On 12 December the Government accepted the JCVI's advice on spring 2025, including that individuals aged six months and over who are immunosuppressed should be eligible for vaccination in spring 2025.

The Government is carefully considering the advice from the JCVI on COVID-19 vaccination for autumn 2025 and spring 2026, and will respond in due course.

Calum Miller:

[19594]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure timely (a) approval and (b) delivery of Novavax vaccine for immunosuppressed people.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has now approved an adapted version of the Nuvaxovid COVID-19 vaccine that targets the Omicron JN.1 COVID-19 subvariant. The press release is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mhra-approves-adapted-nuvaxovid-jn1-covid-19-vaccines-for-adults-and-children-aged-12-plus>

The UK Health Security Agency is unable to comment on any ongoing procurement activity for future campaigns due to commercial sensitivities.

■ **Defibrillators: Public Places**

Dame Caroline Dineneage: [18521]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether automated external defibrillators that are installed on Government buildings are registered with the national defibrillator network.

Dame Caroline Dineneage: [18522]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department is taking steps to encourage community organisations to register defibrillators onto the national defibrillator network.

Dame Caroline Dineneage: [18523]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether recipients of the community automated external defibrillator (AED) fund are required to register their AEDs onto the national defibrillator network.

Dame Caroline Dineneage: [18524]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department plans to take to help increase (a) survival rates from out-of-hospital cardiac arrests and (b) the availability of defibrillators in Gosport.

Andrew Gwynne:

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

The defibrillators provided through this scheme are required to be registered on The Circuit, the national defibrillator ambulance service database, operated independently by the British Heart Foundation in collaboration with the National Health Service. Upon registration, contact details are provided for the nominated AED guardian or guardians, who are local to the defibrillator's location and conduct checks when required. The registered guardian receives an automatic email or text message notification if the defibrillator has potentially been used, therefore prompting the guardian to conduct a check on the AED.

The Department does not hold data on the availability of AEDs in the Gosport area, nor does it hold data on AEDs installed in Government buildings, or whether those AEDs are registered on The Circuit.

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Aviation**Rupert Lowe:****[16882]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many international (a) air miles and (b) flights have been completed by (i) Ministers and (ii) officials in their Department since 5 July 2024.

Karin Smyth:

The number of international air miles travelled by officials in the Department between 5 July and 29 November 2024 was 504,421. The number of flights taken by officials in the Department was 166. We have interpreted officials as all other Departmental staff.

The number of international air miles travelled by ministers in the Department was 36,489. We have not provided the number of flights taken by ministers as this is published on a quarterly basis, a quarter in arrears, on the GOV.UK website. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ministerial-gifts-hospitality-overseas-travel-and-meetings>

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Electronic Purchasing Card Solution**Emily Thornberry:****[18907]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much his Department spent on government procurement card purchases (a) above and (b) below £500 net of refunded payments in (i) 2022 and (ii) 2023.

Karin Smyth:

The Department publishes procurement card transactions of a value greater than £500, with further information available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dh-spending-over-500>

The following table shows the total spend, net of refunds, for transactions lower than £500, for 2022 and 2023:

	2022	2023
Net total payments	£156,905.67	£162,203.92

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Staff**Steve Barclay:****[16483]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many officials were working in his Department, excluding Arm's Length Bodies, on (a) 13 November 2023, (b) 5 July 2024 and (c) 27 November 2024.

Karin Smyth:

The Department only holds data on the number of officials working in the Department at the end of each calendar month. The following table shows the data for the end of each calendar month from July 2022 to October 2024:

MONTH	HEADCOUNT	FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT
July 2022	4,037	3,916
August 2022	3,981	3,840
September 2022	4,015	3,874
October 2022	3,979	3,838
November 2022	3,978	3,837
December 2022	3,913	3,778
January 2023	3,843	3,708
February 2023	3,730	3,598
March 2023	3,670	3,541
April 2023	3,533	3,407
May 2023	3,516	3,392
June 2023	3,456	3,335
July 2023	3,374	3,254
August 23	3,327	3,208
September 2023	3,306	3,187
October 2023	3,301	3,184
November 2023	3,287	3,165
December 2023	3,185	3,073
January 2024	3,185	3,074
February 2024	3,213	3,103
March 2024	3,253	3,146
April 2024	3,308	3,201
May 2024	3,336	3,232
June 2024	3,403	3,294

MONTH	HEADCOUNT	FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT
July 2024	3,450	3,340
August 2024	3,475	3,367
September 2024	3,544	3,431
October 2024	3,599	3,483

■ Diabetes: Shipley

Anna Dixon:

[\[18473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to increase the supply of GLP-1 receptor agonist medications for diabetic patients in Shipley constituency.

Karin Smyth:

There are ongoing global supply issues with some medications used to treat diabetes, and we continue to work closely with industry partners to improve the situation. Supplies of Rybelsus, which is an oral semaglutide available in tablet form, have been boosted to support demand from new patients with type 2 diabetes, as well as those unable to obtain their existing treatment. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's regulatory approval of Mounjaro, an injectable medicine for adults with type 2 diabetes, has brought an additional treatment option to the United Kingdom's market. We have provided advice for healthcare professionals on how to manage patients requiring these medicines whilst there are shortages, and are keeping this under review as the situation evolves. The Department has also added some of these products to the list of medicines that cannot be exported from, or hoarded in, the UK.

The guidance is clear that medications licensed to treat type 2 diabetes should not be prescribed for weight loss, except where specifically licenced for this use. Any patient who is worried about their condition, or access to these medications, should speak to their clinician in the first instance.

The Department monitors and manages medicine supply at a national level, so that stocks remain available to meet regional and local demand. Information on stock levels within individual pharmacies is not held centrally.

■ Family Hubs: Sunderland

Mrs Sharon Hodgson:

[\[18512\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that Start for Life services in Sunderland are funded beyond 1 April 2025.

Andrew Gwynne:

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

The Prime Minister's Plan for Change outlined that we will give children the best start in life by strengthening and joining up family services to improve support through pregnancy and early childhood. There will be investment to continue to build up the Family Hub and Start for Life programme. The Autumn Budget announcement has already confirmed £69 million to continue delivery of a network of Family Hubs in 2025/26.

We are aware that local authorities such as Sunderland are undertaking financial planning for 2025/26, and have communicated with those for whom programme funding information is critical for operational business purposes.

Health Professions: Dismissal**Mark Pritchard:**[\[18356\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many and what proportion of (a) doctors, (b) nurses and (c) other medical professionals were struck off from practicing in the NHS in 2022-23; and if he will publish the country of origin of their baseline medical qualifications.

Karin Smyth:

The Department does not hold the requested information centrally. All groups of healthcare professionals have their own regulatory bodies, for example, the General Medical Council is the regulator of all medical doctors practising in the United Kingdom, and the Nursing and Midwifery Council is the regulator of all nurses and midwives in the UK, and nursing associates in England. Healthcare professional regulators are independent of the Government, are directly accountable to Parliament, and are responsible for operational matters concerning the discharge of their statutory duties. Regulators will hold data on professionals removed from their registers, and may be able to share this information upon request.

Any general practitioner, optometrist, or dentist offering National Health Service primary care services must also be registered on the NHS England Performers Lists. NHS England will hold data on professionals removed from the Performers Lists.

The Department does not intend to publish the country of origin of the baseline medical qualifications held by healthcare professionals removed from regulators' registers or the Performers Lists.

Health Services: Gender Recognition**Tonia Antoniazzi:**[\[8214\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the replacement of the term females with the term individuals with child-bearing potential in Schedule 2 of the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure)

Regulations 2017 on (a) clinical staff and patients' understanding of those Regulations and (b) patient care in sex-specific healthcare settings.

Andrew Gwynne:

A review of the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations (IR(ME)R) 2017 concluded in 2023. Following consultation with expert groups, including the UK Health Security Agency, United Kingdom medical regulators, and professional bodies, the review found that there was no evidence that use of the term 'individuals with child-bearing potential' in the regulations was leading to misinterpretation. The Government is clear that it expects all health services, including medical exposure procedures, to be delivered in line with the Equality Act 2010.

■ **Hospitality Industry: Allergies**

Kate Osamor:

[\[18576\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of making allergen training a mandatory requirement for hospitality venues.

Kate Osamor:

[\[18577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to increase the availability of allergen information in hospitality venues where food is not pre-packed.

Kate Osamor:

[\[18578\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of severe food allergy labelling requirements for hospitality venues.

Kate Osamor:

[\[18579\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will extend the Food Information (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2019 to (a) restaurant menus and (b) non-pre-packed food.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has policy responsibility for food safety, including food allergen labelling, in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and is working to improve the availability and accuracy of allergen information for non-prepacked foods, which includes foods made to order in restaurants.

Last year, the FSA board agreed that businesses selling non-prepacked foods, such as cafes and restaurants, should be required to provide allergen information to consumers in writing, as well as having a conversation.

As a non-ministerial department, the FSA cannot make legislation, but has written to ministers in England and Wales, the Executive in Northern Ireland, and Food Standards Scotland, who would ultimately decide whether to change the law.

Any new legislation needs to be carefully considered, taking into account the views of all stakeholders and the balance of costs and benefits, and the FSA will provide more information to support a decision on legislation if needed.

To make improvements more quickly, the FSA is creating best practice guidance for businesses, which makes it clear that they should provide both written allergen information and support this with a conversation. A public consultation on this guidance has recently concluded and the guidance, along with tools to assist businesses in following it, will be published early next year.

The FSA has conducted a number of research projects looking at the provision of allergen information by businesses, including those in the hospitality sector. The FSA is currently carrying out another two research projects, a consumer survey and a food business survey, to understand the allergen information provision landscape and allow for evaluation of change.

Food business operators are legally required to ensure that food handlers are supervised, instructed, or trained, or both, in food hygiene and safety measures.

The FSA provides support for food businesses through guidance and training to help drive up knowledge and compliance with allergen regulations and safe practices. For example, free allergen e-learning was launched in 2020 and has over 700,000 users to date.

■ Hospitals: Staff

Bobby Dean: [\[17926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of facilities staff are on Agenda For Change contracts.

Karin Smyth:

Facilities staff in the National Health Service may be employed both directly by NHS bodies but also by separate companies who are contracted to deliver services. The Department does not hold information on the number of staff who are employed by companies contracted from outside the NHS to provide services.

Information is held on staff directly employed by NHS trusts and other core organisations in England. From this we can see that as of August 2024, there were 66,597 full time equivalent staff providing hotel, property, and estates functions in NHS trusts and other core organisations. Of these, 4,770, or 7.2%, were not on Agenda For Change pay bands. This staff group will include people employed in roles such as housekeepers, cleaners, porters, catering staff, maintenance roles, and other estates works.

■ Incontinence and Urology: Health Services

Helen Maguire: [\[18075\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve (a) urology and (b) continence services.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England published the Excellence in Continence Care on 23 July 2018, bringing together evidence-based resources and research for guidance for commissioners, providers, and health and social care staff, and which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/excellence-in-continence-care/>

In addition, the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence has produced guidance on the management of faecal incontinence in adults, which healthcare professionals and commissioners are expected to take fully into account when delivering services for people with bowel incontinence.

■ Infant Mortality: Bereavement Counselling**James MacCleary:****[18021]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve support for families affected by baby loss including (a) access to counselling services, (b) support for siblings and (c) training for healthcare professionals in providing compassionate care.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England's Three Year Delivery Plan for Maternity and Neonatal services sets out how the National Health Service will make care safer, more personalised, and equitable. The plan includes a commitment to provide compassionate and high-quality care for bereaved families.

To deliver on this commitment, NHS England has made additional funding available to ensure all trusts can offer a seven day a week bereavement service. NHS England has also invested in Maternal Mental Health Services to provide care for women with moderate to complex or severe mental health difficulties, and published the Core Competency Framework for providers, to address known variation in multi-professional training and competency assessment, including for bereavement care.

Additionally, the National Bereavement Care Pathway (NBCP) aims to reduce the variation in the quality of bereavement care provided by the NHS to ensure that parents receive quality and consistent care after pregnancy or baby loss. The pathway acts as a set of standards and guidance that trusts should follow when a patient has suffered a pregnancy or baby loss, with the aim of ensuring that all bereaved parents are offered equal, high quality, individualised, safe, and sensitive care. Since June 2024, all NHS England trusts had signed up to the NBCP.

To support NHS staff to handle a range of difficult situations, NHS England has also launched an e-learning module, Handling difficult situations – Caring for yourself and others with compassion, for NHS staff in frontline, patient facing roles. This e-learning module, which is available for free, aims to help upskill colleagues in how to handle difficult situations with compassion, using appropriate communication techniques and active listening skills.

■ Kidney Diseases: Medical Treatments

Helen Morgan: [19088]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help increase uptake of SGLT2 inhibitor treatments for people with chronic kidney disease.

Helen Morgan: [19089]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve access to SGLT2 inhibitor treatments for people with chronic kidney disease from underserved communities.

Karin Smyth:

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is the independent body responsible for developing authoritative, evidence-based recommendations for the National Health Service on whether new, licensed medicines represent a clinically and cost-effective use of resources.

The NICE has been able to recommend two SGLT2 inhibitors, empagliflozin and dapagliflozin, for treating chronic kidney disease, subject to specified clinical criteria. The NHS in England is legally required to fund medicines recommended in a NICE appraisal, usually within three months of final guidance, so these treatments should now be available for healthcare professionals to prescribe to NHS patients in line with the NICE's recommendations.

In September 2024, the NICE added links to the relevant technology appraisal guidance on SGLT-2s, for empagliflozin, which has a NICE reference number of TA942, and for dapagliflozin, which has a NICE reference number of TA775, to the guideline Chronic kidney disease: assessment and management. This is to provide easy access to the relevant appraisal guidance at the right point in the guideline, and to help users find the information more easily. Further information on the guidance for chronic kidney disease, specifically recommendation 1.6.9 on SGLT-2s, is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng203/chapter/Recommendations#pharmacotherapy>

The NICE publishes a range of resources to support services in putting its recommendations into practice. The NICE has also published a general practice indicator on chronic kidney disease and SGLT2 inhibitors. NICE indicators measure outcomes that reflect the quality of care or processes, and can be used in a number of different settings to support high quality care, including the uptake of NICE-recommended treatments, such as SGLT2 inhibitors.

The responsibility for implementing NICE guidance rests with the relevant commissioner.

■ Liver Cancer: Screening

Rebecca Smith:

[\[19569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve liver cancer surveillance among higher risk patients with chronic hepatitis B (a) nationally and (b) within Devon Integrated Care System.

Andrew Gwynne:

The National Health Service Cancer Programme is working to detect more hepatocellular carcinomas (HCC) at an early stage when the chances of survival are higher. Six-monthly liver ultrasound surveillance for patients with cirrhosis or advanced fibrosis is key to identifying liver cancers earlier. The programme has been providing funding to Cancer Alliances in 2023/24 and 2024/25, to invest in local liver surveillance programmes. This includes Peninsula Cancer Alliance, which covers Devon.

The cancer programme is also funding two pilot initiatives, the Community Liver Health Checks and liver primary care case finding pilots, to identify people with advanced fibrosis or cirrhosis requiring HCC surveillance. Both pilot initiatives are being delivered across in the peninsula, with one primary care case finding pilot taking place within Devon Primary Care Network.

■ Malaria

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:

[\[19151\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of climate change on instances of malaria in the United Kingdom.

Andrew Gwynne:

Malaria is not currently transmitted in the United Kingdom, but travel-associated cases occur in those who have returned to, or arrived in, the UK from malaria-endemic areas.

Modelling has investigated the impact of different climate change scenarios on the likelihood for plasmodium falciparum transmission in the UK. Four of the five models suggested a low risk by the year 2100, even at extreme scenarios, with the fifth model predicting suitability in southern England for sustained transmission lasting more than one month by 2080.

With climate change, theoretically a warmer summer would reduce the extrinsic incubation of the pathogen in mosquitos and increase the local malaria risk.

■ Medical Treatments

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[19191\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support NHS Trusts to speed up access to innovative therapies before MHRA approval through Early Access Programmes.

Karin Smyth:

NHS England has issued national policy guidelines on free of charge schemes, which are available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/free-of-charge-foc-medicines-schemes-national-policy-recommendations-for-local-systems/>

The only free of charge schemes supported by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and NHS England are those through the Early Access to Medicines Scheme. Other, company led early access programmes operate under the unlicensed medicines scheme, but these are not approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, nor supported by NHS England nationally. Participation in such programmes is decided at an individual National Health Service trust level, in the form of an agreement between the trust and a pharmaceutical company.

■ **NHS: ICT**

Marie Goldman:

[19109]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of standardising of NHS IT systems to help increase levels of efficiency.

Karin Smyth:

Interoperability between IT systems would improve the quality of care and safety for patients, as well as enabling better informed clinical and care decision-making, by allowing for information to be shared easily, in real time, between organisations that use different systems.

Information standards relating to information technology would enable such interoperability. The Government will shortly commence section 95 of the Health and Care Act 2022 and introduce regulations, which will, with Parliament's approval, set out the procedure for preparing and publishing mandatory information standards for public and private health and adult social care providers.

The Data (Use and Access) (DUA) Bill will, Parliament permitting, subsequently make standards mandatory for IT providers in the health and care system, and make provision for ensuring compliance.

The impact assessment for these measures in the DUA Bill estimates benefits in terms of efficiencies of over £100 million over ten years. This is available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6719388b0d1a5bc610b778cd/data_use_and_access_bill_open_data_architecture_information_standards_impact_assessment.pdf

■ NHS: Negligence

Mark Pritchard:

[\[18355\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure NHS Trusts admit early liability and compensate victims of medical negligence whilst under NHS Care.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS Resolution (NHSR) manages clinical negligence and other claims against the National Health Service in England. NHSR has a responsibility to settle claims fairly and promptly, and defend unmeritorious claims to secure NHS resources. Each case must be considered on its own merits, and it is important that a proper investigation is undertaken.

NHSR is committed to the use of dispute resolution interventions, including increased mediation and resolution meetings. Consequently, the percentage of cases settling before formal court proceedings are required has continued to increase. In 2023/24, 81% of the 13,382 clinical claims settled were resolved without formal court proceedings being commenced.

■ NHS: Public Consultation

Joe Robertson:

[\[18296\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 16662 on NHS: Public Consultation, what the budget is for deliberative engagement by type of spend in the 2024-25 financial year.

Karin Smyth:

The public and staff must be at the centre of the development of the plan to make the National Health Service fit for the future, so that it makes a positive impact on their day-to-day lives. That is why we are running a series of in-depth deliberative events and have launched an open platform to hear from members of the public, and those who work in health and care.

Following an invitation to tender the competition process, we appointed Thinks Insight, Kaleidoscope Health and Care, and the Institute for Public Policy Research to support us to run this engagement exercise. A breakdown by type of spend is not available, for commercial confidentiality reasons.

■ Organs: Donors

Helen Maguire:

[\[18074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help encourage more people to become organ donors.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) is responsible for organ donation across the United Kingdom. The Department works closely with NHSBT to identify opportunities to encourage people to record their wishes on the Organ Donor Register, as we know

that approximately nine in 10 families support organ donation going ahead when they know that it is what their loved one wanted. Current examples include building registration into the UK driving licence application and passport renewal process, as well as providing links to the Organ Donor Register in the NHS App. Partnerships like these account for approximately 90% of registrations.

NHSBT runs high profile, year-round campaigns, including Organ Donation Week, World Sight Day, and World Kidney Day, in partnership with a wide range of charities and community groups. NHSBT also funds a network of Organ Donor Ambassadors and provides grants to community groups who raise awareness at a local level.

■ Patients

Julia Buckley: [\[18763\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department will make an assessment of the adequacy of NHS targets for incentivising improvement in patient experience.

Karin Smyth:

The Government is committed to putting patients first, ensuring that they are seen on time, and that they have the best possible experience while they wait for care.

Although no specific assessment has been made of the adequacy of National Health Service targets for incentivising improvement in patient experience, the Government is committed to making improvements. We have an ambitious set of targets that will tackle issues that matter to patients, including returning to the NHS Constitutional standard that 92% of patients wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment.

We also want to improve experience for patients living with complex, long-term, or serious illnesses, like cancer. We are committed to meeting all three NHS cancer waiting time standards across England, so that no patient waits longer than they should for cancer diagnosis or treatment.

■ Prescriptions: Fees and Charges

Vikki Slade: [\[18477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to review the list of conditions eligible for free prescriptions by working age people.

Karin Smyth:

There are no plans to review the list of medical conditions that entitle someone to apply for a medical exemption certificate to exempt people from the prescription charge.

Approximately 89% of prescription items are dispensed free of charge in the community in England, and there are a wide range of exemptions from prescription charges already in place, for which those with the greatest need may be eligible. Eligibility depends on the patient's age, whether they are in qualifying full-time education, whether they are pregnant or have recently given birth, whether they have

a qualifying medical condition, or whether they are in receipt of certain benefits or a war pension.

People on low incomes can apply for help with their health costs through the NHS Low Income Scheme. Prescription prepayment certificates (PPCs) are also available. PPCs allow people to claim as many prescriptions as they need for a set cost, with three-month and 12-month certificates available. The 12-month PPC can be paid for in instalments.

Vikki Slade:

[\[18478\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will reinstate the availability of medications previously available on prescription for (a) households on low incomes and (b) pensioners so that they are free of charge.

Karin Smyth:

There are currently no plans to review the list of items that formed part of the NHS England review into medicines that cannot be routinely supplied. Prescribers are free to make their own decisions on which medicines to prescribe, unless they are banned or restricted, and are held accountable for their prescribing decisions by their employer, and professional regulator. A range of prescription charge exemptions are already in place to help people on low incomes and those aged 60 years old and over.

■ Prostate Cancer: Screening

Jonathan Davies:

[\[19562\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the availability of prostate cancer screenings.

Andrew Gwynne:

Screening for prostate cancer is currently not recommended by the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC). This is because of the inaccuracy of the current best test, called the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA). A PSA-based screening programme could harm some men, as many would be diagnosed with a cancer that would not have caused them problems during their life. This would lead to additional tests and treatments which can also have harmful side effects, for example sexual dysfunction and incontinence.

The UK NSC regularly reviews its recommendations. The evidence review for prostate cancer screening is underway and will conclude at the end of 2025.

■ Rare Diseases: Diagnosis

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[18897\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the UK Rare Diseases Framework, published on 9 January 2021, on reducing the time it takes to diagnose rare diseases.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to improving the lives of those living with rare diseases. The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities collaboratively developed with the rare disease community, including helping patients get a final diagnosis faster. We remain committed to delivering under the framework and will publish an England action plan in 2025.

People living with rare diseases often face long diagnostic odysseys, the time between symptoms first presenting and people receiving a definitive diagnosis. This can seriously affect patients' mental and physical health, and has significant cost implications for the National Health Service. Under action 17, in 2023 we worked with National Institute for Health and Care Research to commission research to measure the diagnostic odyssey. The research project is expected run for two years, concluding in 2026. This research is a crucial step in establishing a baseline time to diagnosis. This baseline will enable us to better understand the impact of interventions designed to help patients get a final diagnosis faster.

Additionally, Genomics England has been allocated Department funding to explore the feasibility of using whole genome sequencing to screen for a defined set of genetic conditions in newborns, through an ethically approved research study. The Generation Study is evaluating the feasibility of using whole genome sequencing to screen up to 100,000 babies for over 200 rare conditions. The Generation Study will explore whether whole genome sequencing can diagnose rare diseases earlier and improve outcomes for newborn babies.

■ Rare Diseases: Health Services**Marsha De Cordova:**[\[18614\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve the (a) assessment of and (b) access to specialist treatments for rare diseases.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Government is committed to improving the lives of those living with rare diseases. The UK Rare Diseases Framework sets out four priorities collaboratively developed with the rare disease community, including improving access to specialist care, treatments, and drugs. We remain committed to delivering under the framework, and will publish an England action plan in 2025. Delivery partners have committed to reviewing the effectiveness of treatment access pathways like the Early Access to Medicines Scheme (EAMs), the Innovative Licensing and Access Pathway (ILAP), and the Innovative Medicines Fund for rare disease therapies.

NHS England commissions over 80 highly specialised services provided to small numbers of patients, which includes services for rare diseases. The services are delivered and co-ordinated nationally through a limited number of expert centres, to develop appropriate clinical quality, expertise, and experience.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency supports development and access to treatments for rare diseases through regulating the medicines supplied in the United Kingdom. These include the Orphan Medicinal Products Regulation, and Marketing Authorisations under Exceptional Circumstances for treatments where there is limited data, such as rare diseases. Additionally, initiatives like Project Orbis, the ILAP, the EAMS, and the Regulatory Advice Service for Regenerative Medicines accelerate access to treatments.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) makes recommendations for the National Health Service on whether all licensed new medicines should be routinely funded by the NHS, based on an assessment of their costs and benefits. The NHS in England is legally required to fund medicines recommended by the NICE, normally within three months of the publication of final guidance. The NICE operates a separate Highly Specialised Technologies (HST) programme for very rare diseases, with significantly higher cost-effectiveness thresholds than those evaluated under the NICE's standard technology appraisal processes. Decisions on whether new medicines should be evaluated through the HST programme are taken by the NICE against published routing criteria.

■ Sanitary Products

Daisy Cooper:

[17889]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to issue statutory guidance on the provision of absorbent products for adult incontinence products.

Karin Smyth:

There are no plans to issue statutory guidance on the provision of absorbent products for adult incontinence, as there is already existing guidance to which the National Health Service must have regard.

NHS England published Excellence in Continence Care on 23 July 2018, bringing together evidence-based resources and research for guidance for commissioners, providers, and health and social care staff, and which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/excellence-in-continence-care/>

NHS England will consider next steps on Excellence in Continence Care through its National Bladder and Bowel Health Project, which aims to improve continence care across the whole public health and care system.

In addition, the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence has produced guidance on the management of faecal incontinence in adults, which healthcare professionals and commissioners are expected to take fully into account when delivering services for people with bowel incontinence.

■ Smoking: Young People

Sir Christopher Chope: **[19233]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the probability of young people switching from vaping to smoking tobacco products as a result of the implementation of a generational ban on tobacco sales.

Andrew Gwynne:

It is very unlikely that young people will switch from vaping to smoking, as the generational ban on tobacco sales will make it illegal for children born on or after 1 January 2009 to ever legally be sold cigarettes or other tobacco products.

Our modelling shows that smoking rates in England for 14 to 30-year-olds could be close to 0% as early as 2050. More information on the modelling and impact from raising the legal age of sale for tobacco products can be seen in the published impact assessment, which is available at the following link:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6733798ff407dcf2b5613588/tobacco-and-vapes-bill-impact-assessment.pdf>

Alongside the generational ban, we have announced strong measures through the Tobacco and Vapes Bill to bring about definitive and positive change to stop future generations from becoming hooked on nicotine, whether that is through cigarettes, vapes, or other nicotine products.

The bill will stop vapes from being deliberately branded and advertised to children, by providing regulatory making powers to restrict flavours, packaging, and changing how and where they are displayed in shops.

■ Surgery: Training

Barry Gardiner: **[18099]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to use (a) robots and (b) AI to help support training on innovative surgical techniques.

Karin Smyth:

The Department and NHS England support the development and use of innovative surgical approaches across the system, where clinically appropriate. Use of such innovative approaches can drive efficiency and improve patient outcomes, but should and will be driven by local and specific need.

The curricula and method of delivery of surgical specialty training is set by the Royal College of Surgeons. The General Medical Council approves the curricula and assessment systems for each training programme.

Barry Gardiner: **[18100]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a national training centre for robotic surgery within

the NHS to provide surgical training that is independent of the manufacturers of robotic surgery equipment.

Karin Smyth:

The Department has no current plans to establish such a national training centre. The Department continues to work with the National Health Service and other partners to develop pathways for delivering innovative medical technology into the hands of front-line clinicians.

The curricula and method of delivery of surgical specialty training is set by the Royal College of Surgeons. The General Medical Council approves curricula and assessment systems for each training programme.

■ **Tropical Diseases**

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:

[\[19150\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to improve the study of tropical diseases in medical school curricula.

Karin Smyth:

It is the responsibility of individual UK medical schools to determine the content of their own curricula. The delivery of these undergraduate curricula has to meet the standards set by the medical regulator, the General Medical Council (GMC), who monitors and checks to make sure that these standards are maintained. GMC standards require the curriculum to be formed in a way that allows all medical students to meet the GMC's Outcomes for Graduates by the time they complete their medical degree, which describes the knowledge, skills and behaviour they have to show as newly registered doctors.

■ **Vaccination: Older People**

Calum Miller:

[\[19592\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of extending the eligibility of Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommendations to include people over 79.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is the United Kingdom's expert committee that advises the Government on immunisations programmes. In line with JCVI's advice, the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccination programme for adults turning 75 years old began on 1 September 2024 in England, alongside a one-off catch-up programme to rapidly vaccinate all those already aged 75 to 79 years old. The JCVI considered that there was less certainty about how well the vaccine works in people aged 80 years old and older, as there were not enough people of this age in the clinical trials to be able to see if the vaccines are protective in this age band. The Department will consider any further

JCVI advice on who should be offered an RSV immunisation as the committee continues to keep the evidence under review.

A phased expansion of the eligible cohort for the routine shingles vaccination programme began in September 2023. The programme currently includes those aged 50 years old and over who are at increased risk of serious complications, and those turning 65 years old on or after 1 September 2023, as well as those turning 70 years old, as was previously the case. In November 2024, the JCVI provided advice to the Department on eligibility for the shingles vaccination programme. This included advice that the Government should consider expanding the shingles vaccination offer to include older adult cohorts aged 80 years old and over. The Department will consider this advice when setting the policy on who should be offered shingles vaccinations.

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum

Rupert Lowe: [18442]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people were granted asylum by the reason for which asylum was granted in each of the last 10 years.

Rupert Lowe: [18444]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people were granted asylum by age in each of the last 10 years.

Rupert Lowe: [18447]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many to asylum claims were (a) made and (b) refused in each of the last five years; and how many people who had made an unsuccessful asylum claim were deported in each of those years.

Rupert Lowe: [18449]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of irregular migrants that entered via small boats have received refugee status in each year since 2018.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on asylum claims and initial decisions on asylum claims by age group is published in tables Asy_D01 and Asy_D02 of the '[Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets](#)'. Data on asylum-related returns is published in table Ret_05 of the '[Returns summary tables](#)' and initial decisions on asylum claims from small boat arrivals is published in table Irr_D03 of the '[Irregular migration to the UK detailed tables](#)'.

Information on how to use the datasets can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbooks. The latest data relates to year ending September 2024.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18445\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department takes steps to communicate with the country of origin of asylum seekers to verify the validity of asylum claims.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Every asylum claim admitted to the UK asylum system is carefully considered on its individual merits by assessing all the evidence provided by the claimant against a background of published country information and a wide range of recognised and publicly available sources.

In accordance with our obligations under the Refugee Convention and domestic law, we do not disclose information about an individual's asylum claim to their home country or seek information in a way that could expose them, or any family who remain in that country, to serious risk. We take any breach of this principle extremely seriously.

■ **Asylum: Sri Lanka**

Chris Philp:

[\[18968\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of allowing Sri Lankans based on Diego Garcia to the UK on the number of people who will begin to attempt to reach the UK via Diego Garcia; and whether any of the 60 Tamil migrants recently arrived have made applications for family to join them.

Dame Angela Eagle:

Diego Garcia has never been a suitable long-term location for the migrants who have arrived there and this Government has worked hard to find a solution that protects both their welfare and the integrity of British territorial borders.

We have now closed down any risk of opening a new route, with any future arrivals to Diego Garcia to be relocated to St Helena until Mauritius takes responsibility for the island. Following this, we have temporarily relocated a small number of migrants, including children and their families, to the UK due to their acute welfare needs, and the lack of any suitable amenities on the island, including healthcare, to address those needs.

In line with normal practice, we will not comment further on those individual cases.

Nick Timothy:

[\[19472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many Sri Lankan nationals on Diego Garcia were excluded from transfer to the UK due to them having (a) criminal convictions and (b) allegations of criminal behaviour.

Nick Timothy: [\[19473\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information she obtained from the Sri Lankan government on the (a) criminal records of and (b) allegations of criminal behaviour made about the Sri Lankan nationals on Diego Garcia.

Nick Timothy: [\[19474\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to authorise the transfer of any remaining Sri Lankan nationals on Diego Garcia to the UK before the eventual handover to Mauritius.

Dame Angela Eagle:

All migrants temporarily relocated to the UK from Diego Garcia have undergone the required security checks in line with the appropriate immigration rules.

Migrants with criminal convictions, charges, or subject to ongoing investigations were not in scope for that relocation. We do not comment on individual cases.

■ **Asylum: Temporary Accommodation**

Neil O'Brien: [\[18998\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will list (a) all the contracts for asylum accommodation and support services the Department has agreed since 2017 and (b) the (i) value of, (ii) regions covered by and (iii) period covered by each contract.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Asylum Accommodation and Support Services agreements and the details sought have been published on Contracts Finder and can be found at:

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract MEE - Contracts Finder](#)

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NEYH - Contracts Finder](#)

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract Wales - Contracts Finder](#)

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract South - Contracts Finder](#)

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract Wales - Contracts Finder](#)

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NW - Contracts Finder](#)

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract Scotland - Contracts Finder](#)

[AASC - Asylum Accommodation & Support Services Contract NI - Contracts Finder](#)

Chris Philp:

[\[19369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has identified alternative accommodation to enable a reduction in the use of hotels to house asylum seekers.

Dame Angela Eagle:

This Government inherited an asylum system under unprecedented strain, with thousands stuck in a backlog without their claims processed.

We remain absolutely committed to ending the use of hotels to ensure value for money. The latest quarterly migration statistics show that at the end of September 2024, the number of asylum seekers in non-hotel accommodation had increased by 5% since the end of June 2024.

We have identified a range of sites that we are narrowing down to a handful of suitable properties that will enable us to exit hotels sooner.

■ Firearms: Licensing

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[18458\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what information her Department holds on the firearms licensing departments that have taken a year or more to process applications for (a) grants and (b) renewals in each of the last five years.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The issuing of firearms certificates and the efficiency of police forces is a matter for individual Chief Constables, who are held to account by Police and Crime Commissioners.

However, the performance of forces in this space is being actively monitored by the National Police Chiefs' Council's lead for firearms licensing, Deputy Chief Constable David Gardner, and both he and his predecessor have been working actively with forces on performance related issues.

■ Migration

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[19065\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what estimate her Department has made of levels of net migration in (a) 2024-25, (b) 2025-26, (c) 2026-27, (d) 2027-28, (e) 2028-29 and (f) 2029-30.

Dame Angela Eagle:

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

■ Offenders: Deportation

Chris Philp:

[\[19372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of Foreign National Offenders challenged deportation in each of the last five years for

which data is available; and how many and what proportion of those challenges were (a) successful and (b) based upon the European Convention on Human Rights.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Right Honourable Member to the answer I gave on 26 November to Question UIN 14746.

■ Police: Pensions

Anna Dixon:

[\[18472\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the timeline is for members of the Immediate Choice Police pension group to receive their McCloud remedy pension payments.

Dame Diana Johnson:

While the Home Office has responsibility for overarching policy and legislative changes to the police pension regulations, the police pension scheme is locally administered by individual police forces.

It is for each chief constable, in their role as scheme manager for their force, to determine their administrative timetable, including when remedy payments will be distributed.

■ Refugees: English Language

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18443\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the total cost to the public purse was of English language courses for refugees in each of the last ten years.

Seema Malhotra:

Home Office does not hold the information requested.

■ Undocumented Migrants

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18441\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department takes to determine the nationality of irregular migrants who do not have documentation.

Dame Angela Eagle:

A range of methods are used to determine the nationality of such individuals, including checking the person's claimed biographic details and biometrics against immigration databases (including records of previous immigration and visa applications), police records, and in some cases international partners.

Where appropriate, the Home Office may also use language analysis testing, in which a person's speech is examined by experts to determine their likely linguistic origin, which can help determine nationality where it is unclear.

■ Visas: Families

Rupert Lowe:

[18440]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many family visas have been granted where the sponsor holds refugee status, broken down by nationality, in each of the last ten years.

Seema Malhotra:

UKVI do not publish data on the immigration status of sponsors for family visa applications. Details of applications issued and refused by nationality and immigration route can be found here: [Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables).

■ Western Jet Foil: Biometrics

Chris Philp:

[18966]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to paragraph 6.37 of the 5th Annual Report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, published on 28 November 2024, whether her Department is taking steps to implement the recommendation to introduce facial recognition for all arrivals at Western Jet Foil.

Dan Jarvis:

The Government published its response to the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation's 5th Annual Report on 28 November 2024 here: [Response to the 2022 annual report on the operation of the terrorism acts by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/response-to-the-2022-annual-report-on-the-operation-of-the-terrorism-acts-by-the-independent-reviewer-of-terrorism-legislation)

The Government is committed to exploring how it can improve and accelerate processes for identifying individuals of potential security concern, including continuing to improve its facial recognition capabilities.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Affordable Housing: Construction

Kevin Hollinrake:

[16935]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answers of (a) 14 October 2024 to Question 6386 and (b) 9 September 2024 to Question 2997 on Affordable Housing, what estimate he has made of the aggregate change in the number of new units in the 2021-26 programme, in the context of her decision to prioritise social rent tenure over other tenure types.

Matthew Pennycook:

As per my response to Question UIN [2997](#) on 9 September 2024, in July we confirmed that the previous government had agreed, but had chosen not to publish, a reduction in the 2021-26 programme's delivery targets from "up to 180,000 homes should economic conditions allow" to between 110,000-130,000. Those revised targets included a goal to achieve at least 40,000 social rent homes.

At that time, we asked Homes England and the Greater London Authority to prioritise the very limited remaining programme funding towards homes for social rent.

We have also asked that the £500 million additional funding announced at Budget is prioritised on social rent homes, and we will keep Parliament updated on delivery.

Uma Kumaran: [\[17420\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to incentivise private developers to build more (a) social and (b) affordable homes.

Matthew Pennycook:

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December includes a number of changes to planning policy designed to support social and affordable housing delivery.

The government is also committed to strengthening the existing system of developer contributions to ensure new developments provide necessary affordable homes and infrastructure. Further details will be set out in due course.

■ Affordable Housing: Greater London

Uma Kumaran: [\[17419\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to increase the number of new social homes built across London; and what assessment she has made of the adequacy of funding for affordable housing in London.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my Hon Friend to my answer to Question UIN [11383](#) on 31 October 2024.

■ Agriculture: Seasonal Workers

Ellie Chowns: [\[17400\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the standard of accommodation provided to seasonal agricultural workers on UK farms in line with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

Ellie Chowns: [\[17401\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking with local authorities to ensure that tied accommodation provided to seasonal agricultural workers meets the Housing Health and Safety Rating System standards.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government appreciates the importance of all seasonal workers living in safe accommodation.

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) provides a framework for identifying hazardous condition in residential premises. Local authorities in England and Wales have a duty to keep the housing conditions in their area under review and have enforcement powers if they identify a hazard through an HHSRS assessment. This applies to accommodation for seasonal agricultural workers that is within scope of the HHSRS. However, as the HHSRS is a system designed for buildings, it does not apply to caravans or other non-building accommodation types.

Guidance for sponsors of seasonal agricultural workers on a Seasonal Worker visa, which can be found on gov.uk [here](#), is also issued. It sets a requirement that scheme operators must ensure that safe and hygienic accommodation is in place, that complies with all relevant UK laws.

■ Building Safety Regulator

Barry Gardiner:

[18097]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to tackle delays in approvals for Gateway (a) 2 and (b) 3 submissions to the Building Safety Regulator.

Barry Gardiner:

[18098]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what information her Department holds on when the Building Safety Regulator plans to respond to the applications for (a) Gateway 2 and (b) Gateway 3 approval for the two high rise blocks on the Wembley Park Quintain Development in Brent West constituency.

Alex Norris:

The Building Safety Regulator (BSR) is an independent regulator, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is not involved in operational decisions, does not hold information on ongoing cases with the BSR, and cannot comment on an individual case. The client, or the person who submitted the application, should engage the BSR directly.

The new Building Control process for higher-risk buildings was introduced as part of the Building Safety Act in 2022 and is an important part of the government's continuing programme of work to ensure people are safe in their homes. We understand that it is taking longer to embed than envisaged and I know the BSR is working with the sector to resolve these issues at pace. My department is closely monitoring the situation to make sure the BSR and industry resolve outstanding delays quickly and make sure the expectations on the quality of submissions are better understood.

■ Buildings: Insurance

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[18136]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the written statement by the Minister of State for Housing and Planning entitled Leasehold and Commonhold Reform of 21 November 2024, HCWS244, when the

consultation on the detail of the ban on buildings insurance remuneration under the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 will commence.

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[18137]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the written statement by the Minister of State for Housing and Planning entitled Leasehold and Commonhold Reform of 21 November 2024, HCWS244, when the consultation on (a) service charges and (b) legal costs under the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 will commence.

Rebecca Long Bailey:

[18138]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of urgent provision of legal aid for leaseholders facing unfair charges.

David Pinto-Duschinsky:

[18335]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support leaseholders with rises in (a) ground rent, (b) service charges and (c) building insurance in Hendon.

Matthew Pennycook:

The consultation on introducing permitted insurance fees for landlords, freeholders and property managing agents was launched on 2 December and can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

As per my Written Ministerial Statement of 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)), the government will look to consult on the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act's provisions on service charges and on legal costs next year, bringing these measures into force as quickly as possible thereafter.

We remain firmly committed to our manifesto commitment to tackle unregulated and unaffordable ground rents, and we will deliver this in legislation.

The government funds the provision of free information and advice by the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE).

■ Business Premises: Rents

Jeremy Corbyn:

[18102]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to ensure that landlords who are found liable for rent repayment orders in tribunal pay back monies owed.

Matthew Pennycook:

[Holding answer 11 December 2024]: Rent repayment orders (RROs) are an important and effective tenant-led enforcement tool. They deter landlords from non-compliance and empower tenants to take action against unscrupulous landlords.

The Renters' Rights Bill includes measures to significantly strengthen and expand RROs. Changes include doubling the maximum amount a landlord can be ordered to pay, extending them to new offences, doubling the period in which tenants and local authorities can apply, making superior landlords and company directors liable and requiring landlords to pay the maximum amount when they have been convicted.

When an RRO is made, the relevant landlord must pay. Where they do not, the tenant or local authority can apply to the county court for a judgment to enable enforcement of the debt through the court. If necessary, the tenant or local authority can, for example, use county court bailiffs to enforce the order and recover the debt.

■ Council Tax: Greater London

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[18370\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 8 November 2024 to Question 11925 on Council tax: Greater London and with reference to the Urgent Question on Council Tax of 14 November 2024, Official Report, column 907, what assumption her Department used of the (a) pound and (b) proportionate increase of the police precept in the context of the council tax receipts figure within the core spending power calculation for the 2025-26 financial year.

Jim McMahon:

The Local Government Finance Policy Statement published on 28 November set out proposed referendum principles for 2025-25. This included a £14 principle for police authorities, compared to a £13 principle in 2024-25. Together with central government grant and locally retained business rates, the proposed principles provide a real-terms increase in core spending power of around 3.2% next year.

■ Elections

Kim Johnson:

[\[18406\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she (a) is taking and (b) plans to take to communicate to eligible (i) EU, (ii) migrant and (iii) other voters the provisions of the Elections Act 2022.

Rushanara Ali:

The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to raise public awareness of all elements of the democratic process, including changes made to it, to ensure voters can participate. The Government will continue to support the Commission in communicating the provisions of the Elections Act 2022 to eligible voters, including eligible EU and migrant voters.

■ Garden Communities: Sittingbourne

Helen Whately:

[\[17574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what criteria she uses to call in planning applications before they are discussed by local councillors.

Helen Whately: [\[17575\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reason she called in Highsted Park outline planning applications 21/503906/EIOUT and 21/503914/EIOUT.

Helen Whately: [\[17580\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how safeguarding the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land will be taken into account when she considers the Highsted Park development.

Matthew Pennycook:

Call-in decisions are inherently about process and not the merits of any given planning application.

I refer the hon Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made on 26 March 2019 ([HCWS1452](#)), and on 26 October 2012, [columns 71WS-72WS](#).

All relevant matters relating to the Highsted Park development will now be considered via a public inquiry.

■ **Green Belt: Hertfordshire**

Victoria Collins: [\[17389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to protect the green belt in (a) Harpenden and Berkhamsted constituency, (b) Tring and (c) Dacorum, in the context of the consultation entitled Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, updated on 24 September 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is committed to preserving Green Belts which have served England's towns and cities well over many decades, not least in terms of checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another.

The government's new approach to the Green Belt, including prioritising the release of lower quality grey belt land and introducing 'golden rules' to ensure development benefits communities and nature, is set out in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published on 12 December.

As set out in the government response to the proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system consultation, which can be found on gov.uk [here](#), we recognise the need for further guidance to ensure a more consistent approach to assessing Green Belt land and will provide it in January 2025.

In addition, to ensure that local authorities are supported to implement the changes in the NPPF, we will also provide a funding contribution to local authorities that will need to undertake Green Belt reviews as a result of our policy changes. Local authorities

that meet our eligibility criteria will be able to submit an Expression of Interest to receive a share of this funding.

■ **Homelessness: South Holland and the Deepings**

Sir John Hayes:

[18344]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many people are living in emergency accommodation in South Holland and the Deepings constituency.

Rushanara Ali:

South Holland District council had 21 households in temporary accommodation as of 30 June 2024. The most recent temporary accommodation numbers by local authority are available at Tab TA1 [Detailed LA 202406 fix.xlsx](#).

■ **Housing Associations: Vulnerable Adults**

Rachel Gilmour:

[17406]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will make an assessment of the adequacy of regulation on the duty of care transfer of vulnerable tenants from housing associations to village agents.

Matthew Pennycook:

Registered providers of social housing must ensure that the safety of tenants is considered in the design and delivery of landlord services and take reasonable steps to mitigate any identified risks to tenants.

In addition, registered providers must take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants, including by understanding the diverse needs of tenants, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers, and additional support needs.

Housing associations may refer a tenant to a village agent but there is not a mechanism through which they can transfer the duty of care. In any situation where a village agent provides care or support for vulnerable tenants, a housing association remains responsible for considering the safety of tenants and their diverse needs.

■ **Housing: Disability**

Anna Dixon:

[18470]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of raising the baseline accessibility standard for new build homes to Part M4(2) of the building regulations.

Alex Norris:

I refer my Hon Friend to my answer to Question UIN [12990](#) on 25 November 2024.

■ Housing: Hertfordshire

Victoria Collins:

[17390]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will take steps to ensure that communities receive required infrastructure upgrades before new houses are occupied in (a) Harpenden and Berkhamsted constituency and (b) Dacorum Borough Council area.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner.

Local development plans should address needs and opportunities in relation to infrastructure and identify what infrastructure is required and how it can be funded and brought forward. When preparing a Local Plan, Planning Practice Guidance recommends that local planning authorities use available evidence of infrastructure requirements to prepare an Infrastructure Funding Statement. Such Statements can be used to demonstrate the delivery of infrastructure throughout the plan-period.

The government provides financial support for essential infrastructure in areas of greatest housing demand through the Housing Infrastructure Fund.

The changes to the National Planning Policy Framework announced on 12 December will support the increased provision and modernisation of various types of public infrastructure.

The government is also committed to strengthening the existing system of developer contributions to ensure new developments provide necessary affordable homes and infrastructure. Further details will be set out in due course.

■ Land Use: Property Development

David Williams:

[17959]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle land banking.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government wants to see homes built faster and we recognise the frustrations that stalled or delayed sites can cause to communities.

Once housebuilders have been granted permission for residential development, meeting local housing needs and preferences, we expect to see them built out as quickly as possible.

Local planning authorities already have powers to issue a completion notice to require a developer to complete their development if it is stalled. If they fail to do so, the planning permission for the development will lapse.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December includes policies designed to support increased build out rates, including the promotion of mixed tenure development.

In addition, our New Homes Accelerator aims to unblock and accelerate the delivery of housing developments that have for various reasons become delayed, or which are not progressing as quickly as they could be.

To enhance transparency and accountability in respect of build out rates, the government intend to take steps to implement build out reporting following technical consultation.

We also intend to provide local planning authorities with powers to decline to determine planning applications submitted by developers who have failed to implement previous permissions.

■ Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024

Barry Gardiner:

[\[18875\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Statement of 21 November 2024 on Leasehold and Commonhold Reform, HCWS244, what discussions she has had with the Leader of the House on bringing forward legislation to amend the operation of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

As outlined in the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)), the Leasehold and Freehold Act contains a small number of specific but serious flaws which would prevent certain provisions from operating as intended. We intend to rectify these via primary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

■ Leasehold: Reform

Tom Morrison:

[\[18426\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of abolishing residential leaseholds.

Matthew Pennycook:

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

■ Lobbying

Dan Carden:

[\[18385\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will have discussions with the Electoral Commission on the potential implications for (a) her and (b) the Commission's policies of Transparency International's position paper entitled Cheques and balances: Countering the influence of big money in UK politics, published in December 2024.

Rushanara Ali:

Effective regulation and enforcement of political finance are crucial for maintaining public trust in our electoral systems. The Government is committed to strengthening our democracy and upholding the integrity of elections and, as stated in our manifesto, we intend to strengthen the rules around donations to political parties to protect our democracy. My department is working closely with the Electoral Commission on developing proposals to give effect to this commitment. We are also seeking, and remaining open to, evidence from key stakeholders, particularly in relation to threats to our democracy.

Local Government Finance**Vikki Slade:**[\[18479\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to ensure that the next local government finance settlement includes additional funding to meet higher costs arising from changes to (a) the national minimum wage and (b) employer National Insurance contributions for (i) social care, (ii) respite, (iii) hospice, (iv) charitable, (v) occupational and (vi) other health providers that have been contracted by (A) local authorities and (B) the NHS.

Jim McMahon:

We recognise the challenges that local authorities are facing. We have listened to voices across the sector and we prioritised local government at the Budget, where we announced over £4 billion in additional funding for local government services, including £1.3 billion which will go through the Settlement.

Overall, the provisional Settlement will mean local government receives an around 3.2% increase overall in Core Spending Power. This is a real terms increase. 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: Voting Rights**Kim Johnson:**[\[18404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what (a) guidance and (b) support her Department provides to local (i) councillors and (ii) authorities on voter eligibility requirements.

Kim Johnson:[\[18405\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what support her Department provides to (a) voter groups and (b) civil society organisations on changes to voter eligibility requirements under the Elections Act 2022.

Rushanara Ali:

The Electoral Commission, as the independent electoral regulator, holds responsibility for issuance of guidance and support for candidates, agents and local authorities on electoral registration and voting.

This can be found at: [Our guidance | Electoral Commission](#).

The Electoral Commission also worked (and has continued to work) with voter groups and civil society organisations by providing information and raising awareness on changes to voter registration and eligibility requirements following the passage of the Elections Act 2022.

Local Government: Working Hours**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18371\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has received representations from (a) trade unions and (b) local authorities other than South Cambridgeshire District Council on a potential four day week on full pay for local government since 5 July 2024.

Jim McMahon:

Local authorities are independent employers, responsible for the management and organisation of their own workforces; the Department has not received representations from trade unions or any other local authority on a potential four-day week on full pay for local government since 5 July 2024.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Birmingham**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18376\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many staff will be affected by the closure of her Department's Birmingham office; and whether she plans to co-locate staff in the Government Hub in Birmingham.

Alex Norris:

As at the 30 November 2024 there were 149 employees of the department based in the Birmingham office. The department is consulting staff and Trade Unions on the decision to close the Birmingham office. This consultation will consider the impact on the individuals affected with a view to putting in place measures to mitigate that impact and enable them to continue to perform their roles effectively.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Offices**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18373\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether trade unions were consulted on her Department plans to close its offices in (a) Birmingham, (b) Exeter, (c) Truro, (d) Sheffield, (e) Warrington and (f) Newcastle; and whether she has received any notifications of industrial action on the matter.

Alex Norris:

The department is consulting Trade Unions and staff on the decision to close six offices over the next two years. The department has not received any notification of industrial action on this matter.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Public Appointments**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[18378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6112 on MHCLG: Public Appointments, if she will name the four public appointees who left their posts; and whether they were asked to resign.

Alex Norris:

The four appointees were: Dame Alison Nimmo, Lord Porter, Jeff Dodds and Tom Taylor. The new administration decided to appoint new non-executive board members upon taking office.

■ **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Staff**

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[18374\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many (a) teams and (b) staff work in her Department's offices in (i) Birmingham, (ii) Exeter, (iii) Truro, (iv) Sheffield, (v) Warrington and (vi) Newcastle.

Alex Norris:

As of 30 November 2024, (a) all six of the department's Director General led teams had some representation in the six named locations. Details are set out below, with data withheld where it might lead to the identification of individuals. However, in total on 30 November 2024, 367 staff were (b) working at these locations and engaged on the department's payroll.

(A) TEAMS AND STAFF (B)							
WORKING FROM EACH							
LOCATION AS OF 30TH NOV 2024	(i) BIRMINGHAM	(ii) EXETER	(iii) TRURO	(iv) SHEFFIELD	(v) WARRINGTON	(vi) NEWCASTLE	GRAND TOTAL
Corporate Services	46	7	...	8	76
Local Government and Public Services	28	8	12	9	61
Local Growth, Communities and Devolution	16	9	...	11	22	20	81
Regeneration, Housing and Planning	37	14	9	21	88

(A) TEAMS AND STAFF (B)

WORKING FROM EACH

LOCATION AS OF 30TH NOV 2024	(i) BIRMINGHAM	(ii) EXETER	(iii) TRURO	(iv) SHEFFIELD	(v) WARRINGTON	(vi) NEWCASTLE	GRAND TOTAL
Safer and Greener Buildings	17	7	9	...	43
Strategy and Communications	18
Grand Total	149	26	15	51	59	67	367

Kevin Hollinrake:[\[18375\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has plans to move additional staff from (a) her Department and (b) arms length bodies to office locations outside London.

Alex Norris:

The Department will continue to grow its presence outside London in order to meet its ambition of 50% of roles being outside of London. Currently 45% of staff are in the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. The Department's Arm's Length Bodies have their own plans for the number of roles which will be based outside London.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Written Questions

Kevin Hollinrake:[\[18372\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to respond to Question 9070 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Civil Servants, tabled by the hon. Member for Bridgwater on 14 October 2024.

Alex Norris:

A response was given to the hon Member for Bridgwater on 10 December 2024.

■ New Towns

Kevin Hollinrake:[\[16954\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the provision of new housing through New Towns counts towards housing targets in Local Plans.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government established the New Towns Taskforce in September 2024, tasking this independent expert advisory panel with making recommendations to ministers within 12 months on the location and delivery of new large-scale new communities in England.

As detailed in the Taskforce's full terms of reference, which can be found on gov.uk [here](#), the panel will advise on a 'New Towns Prospectus' – standards that developers must meet in these new settlements (covering social and affordable homes, design, transport links to towns and city centres, public transport, green spaces), as well as what the government 'offer' is in return.

We have been clear that the next generation of new towns will deliver over and above local housing need assessed through the new standard method. We intend to keep under review the interaction between new towns and local housing need figures, taking into account the Taskforce's final report once submitted in July 2025.

■ Planning Permission

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[17129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance her Department issues on whether a planning application previously been rejected by a planning authority can be resubmitted without substantive changes.

Matthew Pennycook:

Planning Practice Guidance found on gov.uk [here](#), sets out the position on this matter. The guidance makes clear that section 70A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows local planning authorities to decline planning applications for recently refused proposals and sets out the circumstances in which this applies.

■ Planning Permission: Local Press

Daisy Cooper:

[\[17230\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of including local online news publications in the definition of local newspapers for the advertisement of planning notices.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer the hon Member to the answer given to Question UIN [15985](#) on 3 December 2024.

■ Public Transport: Portland

Edward Morello:

[\[17452\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment has her department made of the potential impact of the operation of the new waste incinerator on Portland on public transport in West Dorset constituency.

Matthew Pennycook:

Full reasons for the decision are set out in the published decision letter and Inspector's Report. The Inspector's Report provides a complete list of the evidence which was before the Inquiry. Having issued this decision, the Secretary of State has

no further jurisdiction in the matter, and it would not be appropriate to comment further.

■ Right to Buy Scheme

Claire Young:

[\[19500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she has taken to communicate the recent changes to the Right to Buy scheme to eligible social housing tenants.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government made clear in its manifesto that it intended to review the increased right to buy discounts introduced in 2012 and reiterated this in a Written Ministerial Statement on 30 July. The Right to Buy discounts review was published alongside the Budget on 30 October, and we announced that discounts would reduce to between £16,000 and £38,000 (varying by region).

We have taken a number of steps to communicate this announcement to social landlords and tenants. We wrote to both councils and registered providers through the National Housing Federation. We ensured the government's helpline, the Right to Buy Agent Service, immediately had the new information. We also updated all relevant online materials, including the Right to Buy summary booklet, and the guidance documents that we provide for both tenants and landlords.

All the documents explained that the changes would come into force on 21 November, whilst making it clear that applications received by social landlords from eligible tenants before 21 November 2024 would be eligible for the previous maximum cash discounts. We also released press notices highlighting the discount changes and the timeframe for their implementation.

■ Sleeping Rough

Andrew Cooper:

[\[19532\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what progress her Department has made on ending rough sleeping in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) the rest of England.

Rushanara Ali:

Homelessness levels are far too high. This can have a devastating impact on those affected.

We are already taking the first steps to get back on track to ending homelessness. As announced at the Budget, funding for homelessness services is increasing next year by £233 million compared to this year (2024/25). This increased spending will help to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping. This brings total spend to nearly £1 billion in 2025/26.

The Government is also taking action by setting up a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group which the Deputy Prime Minister will chair, bringing together ministers from

across government to develop a long-term strategy to put us back on track to ending homelessness.

Two unitary authorities in Cheshire received funding to tackle rough sleeping through the Rough Sleeping Initiative in 2024/25:

- Cheshire East UA received £222 thousand; and
- Cheshire West & Chester UA received £661 thousand.

Future allocations to local authorities will be announced in due course and made available on gov.uk.

■ Social Rented Housing

Ellie Chowns:

[18291]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the amount of social housing available for families in need of housing support who need four or more bedrooms.

Matthew Pennycook:

Data is collected on the number of households on local authority housing registers requiring three or more bedrooms. This stood at 69,434 as of 31 March 2024. Data on households requiring four or more bedrooms is not collected but will be a subset of this number (Source: [Section C, Local Authority Housing Statistics 2023-24](#). Please note the data in the table covers both general needs and supported housing lettings).

In 2023/24 there were 41,159 new general needs social housing lettings with three or more bedrooms, of which 4,163 were lettings with 4 or more bedrooms. (Source: Table 2c ([Social housing lettings in England tenancies summary tables April 2023 to March 2024.ods](#)). Please note the data in the table only covers general need lettings as the number of bedrooms is not collected for supported housing lettings).

Andrew Cooper:

[19142]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to increase the supply of social housing in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my Hon Friend to my answer to Question UIN [11383](#) on 31 October 2024.

■ Social Rented Housing: Foreign Nationals

Rupert Lowe:

[18265]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's statistics on Social housing lettings in England, April 2023 to March 2024, published on 5 December 2024, whether her Department is taking steps to reduce the number of (a) EEA and (b) other nationals entering social housing.

Rupert Lowe:

[18266]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's statistics on Social housing lettings in England, April 2023 to March 2024, published on 5 December 2024, if she will make an estimate of the number of social housing properties in which the lead tenant was a (a) UK, (b) EEA and (c) other national in each year since 2010.

Rupert Lowe:

[18267]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's statistics entitled Social housing lettings in England, tenancies: April 2023 to March 2024, published on 5 December 2024, if she will breakdown other in table 3g by (a) home country left by refugee, (b) discharged from prison and (c) housed by national asylum support service in each year since 2007.

Matthew Pennycook:

People are generally eligible for social housing if they have leave to remain in the UK and have recourse to public funds.

Only individuals that are eligible can join housing registers and be given a social housing tenancy.

The Home Office decides whether persons from abroad have leave to remain in the UK and whether they have recourse to public funds.

Where foreign nationals are eligible, they will have their housing needs considered on the same basis as other eligible applicants in accordance with the relevant local authority's housing allocation scheme.

The government response to the January 2024 consultation on changes to social housing allocation tests can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

■ Social Rented Housing: Heat Pumps

Rachel Gilmour:

[17405]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential impact of mechanical failure of Magna Air Source heat pumps in social housing on tenants.

Matthew Pennycook:

Heat Pumps are often a highly effective low carbon alternative to a traditional gas boiler and can save families around £100 a year compared to a gas boiler through the effective use of a smart tariff. However, as with any repair, social housing providers like Magna should ensure any heat pumps installed are well maintained and fixed promptly in line with their regulatory standards when maintenance issues arise.

While Housing Associations are independent organisations and are responsible for their own performance and management, tenants can raise a formal complaint

through their landlord's complaint process and through the Housing Ombudsman if the landlord fails to take appropriate action.

■ **Social Rented Housing: Nationality**

Rupert Lowe: [18437]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her Department's statistics entitled Social housing lettings in England, tenancies: April 2023 to March 2024, published on 5 December 2024, what the ten most common non-UK nationalities were in social housing since 2007.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Department does not hold this data.

While the accredited official statistics, [Social Housing Lettings in England 2023/24](#), published on 5 December 2024, provides information on the nationality of the lead tenant in new social lettings grouped by UK, Republic of Ireland, Other EEA, Rest of world, data is not collected on individual nationalities.

■ **Universal Studios: Bedfordshire**

Ben Obese-Jecty: [17643]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had discussions with the (a) Cabinet colleagues, (b) local authorities and (c) water companies on the potential impact of the proposed Universal Studios theme park in Bedfordshire on water (i) demand and (ii) supply in the East of England in the context of planned house-building in the region.

Alex Norris:

Given this is a potential matter that may come before the Secretary of State for decision, it would not be appropriate to comment on planning merits of any Universal Studios proposal in Bedford.

Planning decisions are not subject to Cabinet responsibility and are made by the decisions maker on planning grounds, based on the merits of the case and in line with propriety guidelines.

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations are published on gov.uk.

JUSTICE

■ **Courts: Finance**

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [17041]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending the unit of measurement for court funding to judicial working days from sitting days.

Sarah Sackman:

The funding of HM Courts and Tribunals Service is agreed annually between the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals, via the Concordat process.

Sitting days are an important metric used in this process, because they currently provide the best basis for estimating the number of case disposals that can be achieved for a given level of funding. This is essential to assess any funding proposal's impact on waiting times, caseloads and access to justice.

Judicial working time incorporates other important tasks (including work outside the hearing room, training, recruitment and leadership work) in addition to the time sitting in courts and tribunals. Work is underway to consider whether the definition of a 'sitting day' can be updated and improved to account for work outside of the hearing room that directly helps to progress cases towards disposal.

As the Lord Chancellor has previously set out, she is determined that the Concordat process under her will be different and improved.

■ Prisoner Escorts**Karl Turner:**[\[18928\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 14304 on Prisoners Escort, how her Department collects data on prisoner delays.

Karl Turner:[\[18929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, pursuant to the Answer of 20 November 2024 to Question 14304 on Prisoners Escort, how her Department defines agreed court start times.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

The team in HM Prison & Probation Service responsible for managing the Prisoner Escort & Custody Service (PECS) contracts collects data relating to trial delays from several sources. HM Courts and Tribunal Service submits a Court Exceptions Report in respect of each instance of hearing delay; the contractors also self-report any delays; and the contract management team undertake further assurance work through site visits.

Court operating times were agreed with HM Courts and Tribunal Service as part of the procurement process for the PECS contracts and are set out in contract schedules. For each court day, the start time is determined by the judge, taking account of the scheduled operating time. The PECS contractor is required to produce the prisoner in advance of the start time decided by the judge, provided this is within the operating times set out in the contract.

■ Prisoners' Release: Crimes of Violence

Tom Morrison:

[18425]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of excluding violent offenders who have breached lifetime restraining orders while in custody from the early release scheme.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Certain offences have been excluded from SDS40. This includes serious violent offences with a sentence of four years or more; specified offences linked to domestic abuse irrespective of sentence length (including stalking, coercive or controlling behaviour and non-fatal strangulation), and sex offences irrespective of sentence length.

To keep the public safe, we have kept the measures under review and acted immediately to address a small number of anomalies in the legislation. This means that anyone convicted of a breach of restraining order, breach of sexual harm prevention order, and breach of a stalking protection order would not be released early under SDS40.

Any increased risks shown by an offender's custodial behaviour, such as behaviour that breaches a lifetime restraining order, will inform the licence conditions and risk management plans put in place by Probation practitioners for that offender's release once they have served the custodial part of their sentence.

■ Prisoners' Release: Re-offenders

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[18895]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what changes have been made to prisoner recalls following the review of Probation Recall Culture and Practice, published in December 2020.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation published a report on 10 November 2020 entitled: 'A thematic review of probation recall culture and practice'. In this report, the Chief Inspector found that the Probation Service was taking proportionate and necessary decisions to recall offenders on licence for public protection.

HMPPS published its Action Plan responding to the thematic review on 7 December 2020, and subsequently updated on its progress the following year.

This contains details on the actions completed and can be found at GOV.UK here: [Action Plan Update December 2021 Final.pdf](#).

■ Prisoners' Release: Temporary Accommodation

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18438\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisoners (a) have been released under the early release scheme and (b) are housed in (i) hotels and (ii) other contingency accommodation.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

There were 1,889 SDS40 'Tranche 1' prisoner releases on 10 September 2024 (day one of tranche 1). There were 1,223 SDS40 'Tranche 2' prisoner releases on 22 October 2024 (day one of tranche 2).

The number of people released in total so far under SDS40 and the number housed in hotels and other contingency accommodation forms a subset of prison releases data which is scheduled for future publication.

■ Prisons: Security

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst:

[\[18278\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when her Department was informed that former employees of (a) ISG and (b) ESS had access to the layout of prison estates; for what reason former employees were able to access the plans following the cessation of their employment; what assessment her Department has made of whether the former employees of other companies have had similar access; and what steps her Department is taking to prevent a similar security breach in the future.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

When ISG Construction Limited entered administration on 20 September 2024, the Ministry of Justice took the necessary measures to immediately secure its data. Access to the Department's software platform was immediately revoked to former employees of ISG and ESS, and the respective subcontractors.

The Department was informed on 26 November 2024 that a small number of former employees of ISG and ESS, and the respective subcontractors, had accessed an active software platform managed by ESS following the administration. As soon as the Department was made aware of this, we liaised with the Administrator to ensure they revoked access. This was completed within 24 hours, on 27 November 2024.

The Ministry of Justice is investigating the incident and any steps required to prevent a similar incident in future.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner: Public Appointments

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[19248\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent estimate he has made of when the Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner will be appointed.

Hilary Benn:

The Government recognises the dedicated service of all our veterans and is committed to supporting the veteran community across the whole of the UK.

I have previously made clear my intention to confirm the appointment of a new Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner before the end of the year and expect to make an announcement shortly.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**■ Broadband: Repairs and Maintenance**

Ian Sollom: [\[18428\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to speed up the pace of repairs to damaged broadband cables in rural areas.

Ian Sollom: [\[18429\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help support people in areas where (a) there is damage to broadband cables and (b) other repairs are required to access to broadband services.

Chris Bryant:

The Department works with Ofcom and communication providers to ensure broadband services are resilient and reliable. All communication providers have statutory obligations to maintain their networks and services. Ofcom has the power to investigate, rectify, and penalise providers for breaches. Consumers can report faults or delays on Ofcom's website. Additionally, customers of the 10 providers who have signed up to Ofcom's automatic compensation scheme can be compensated as a result of a delayed repair following loss of service.

■ Infrastructure: Climate Change

Andrew Rosindell: [\[16129\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he has taken to help protect national infrastructure assets from climate change.

Feryal Clark:

The Department is supporting the third National Adaptation Programme 3 (NAP3) and climate change initiatives by working with various agencies to protect infrastructure from climate hazards. NAP3 runs from 2023 to 2028 and sets out how government will respond to the risks identified in our third Climate Change Risk Assessment. NAP3 includes a dedicated chapter on managing the risks to infrastructure services. The Government is committed to further strengthening the nation's resilience, including in our approach to managing climate risks to the UK.

■ Semiconductors: Northern Ireland

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[19249\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the Semiconductor Advisory Panel will meet in Northern Ireland in 2025.

Feryal Clark:

The government recognises that semiconductors are a UK wide strength, with clusters spread across the country, including in Northern Ireland. It is critical that the Semiconductor Advisory Panel can speak to all geographies of the semiconductor community.

The Panel was recently renewed for another 18-month term and will meet quarterly. It will meet primarily in London but may hold meetings in regions and nations of the UK that have strengths in the sector where possible.

■ Social Media: Young People

Jessica Toale:

[\[19533\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps his Department is taking to help protect young people from the potential dangers of social media.

Feryal Clark:

Our priority is the effective implementation of the Online Safety Act so that children benefit from its wide-reaching protections.

The Act requires all services in scope to take steps to protect users, including children, from illegal content and criminal behaviour. In addition, services likely to be accessed by children are required to risk assess their service and provide safety measures, including the use of highly effective age assurance, to protect children from harmful content.

Ofcom has duty to promote media literacy to help the public understand the nature and impact of where harmful content and online behaviour affects certain groups.

TRANSPORT

■ A12: Essex

Priti Patel:

[\[18366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 6 December 2024 to Question 16758 on A12: Essex, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of delays to the implementation of the A12 widening Scheme on (a) the economy, (b) road safety and (c) the projected cost to the public purse of the A12 widening scheme.

Lilian Greenwood:

As set out in the Fixing the Foundations policy paper, this government has inherited £22bn worth of unfunded pressures from the previous government, including £2.9bn

of unfunded transport commitments. There has not been a spending review since 2021.

It was announced in the Autumn Budget that Phase 2 of the Spending Review will conclude in late spring 2025. Until this time, it is not possible to assess the full impact of the financial inheritance on the A12 widening scheme and in turn its impact on (a) the economy, (b) road safety and (c) the projected cost to the public purse of the scheme.

■ A21: Safety

Mike Martin: [\[19169\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her expected timeline is for (a) hedgegrow maintenance and (b) vegetation clearance along the A21 in the Lamberhurst area.

Mike Martin: [\[19170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the A21 Safety Package will address visibility issues.

Mike Martin: [\[19171\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department plans to take to monitor the effectiveness of the A21 Safety Package; and what metrics will be used to measure safety improvements.

Mike Martin: [\[19172\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has had discussions with National Highways on the long-term plans for upgrading the A21.

Lilian Greenwood:

National Highways' South Central Route Strategy recognises the current pressures and future needs of the A21 in Kent particularly around journey time reliability and safety. National Highways will consider the case and priority for further improvements to the route as part of its future investment planning.

Regarding hedgerow maintenance, National Highways regularly inspects the A21 to ensure safety and maintain vegetation. Hedge maintenance and clearance are carried out on a schedule to balance safety and environmental needs. For hedgerows, work is typically done outside the bird nesting season, from October to February. Shrubs are maintained every three years, and woodland is managed every seven years. Where responsibilities for maintenance falls to landowners, National Highways intends to raise awareness about vegetation clearance with residents living along the A21.

The A21 Safety Package is a series of schemes to improve safety along the route which includes among others junction improvements, changes to speed limits, improved signage and road markings, and improvements to road visibility. On the issue of visibility, where this was identified as a risk during the design stage, the

interventions being delivered will address that. For example, work has been undertaken to improve visibility at Vinehall School, where visibility was identified as a factor to the conflicting movement at the exit/entrance of the school. National Highways undertook clearance works to improve the visibility splay, which was completed in the last financial year. In November 2024 National Highways undertook vegetation clearance at Riverhill lay-bay to help make the lay-bay more visible to the users.

Finally, as with all the safety measures, National Highways will carry out a post implementation analysis to evaluate the safety interventions undertaken on the A21. Post analysis normally includes a road safety audit which provides an effective, independent review of the road safety implications of the interventions for all road users. Evaluation usually happens 12-18 months after the intervention and the metrics measured will vary depending on the type of intervention.

■ **A5: Hinckley**

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[19388\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A5 Dodwells to Longshoot RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew:

[\[19389\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the M42 Junction 6 RP2 project.

Lilian Greenwood:

The A5 Dodwells to Longshoot scheme was cancelled in July 2021 due to the scheme being poor value for money. The M42 Junction 6 scheme is in construction and is forecast to complete in the year 2026/27.

■ **Blue Badge Scheme**

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[19234\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make it her policy that local authorities issuing Blue Badges within her Department's guideline timescale of 12 weeks will be able to recover the full costs of delivering that service.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Blue Badge scheme is administered, funded and operated at local level by individual local authorities. There are no timescales set for administering applications other than a suggested guideline that issuing authorities should aim to complete end to end applications within 12 weeks.

In England local authorities are legally entitled to charge a fee of up to £10 for each badge issued which allows them to recover some of the costs involved in administering the scheme. The Department has no plans to amend legislation.

■ Bus Services: Cycleways**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[19404\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions her Department has had with Active Travel England on the use of bus stop bypasses.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department is carefully considering options in developing next steps on bus stop bypasses. Active Travel England has been involved in those discussions as the executive agency of the Department with a remit to help deliver increases in walking and cycling. The Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee has also provided input, in their role as a statutory advisory body on disability transport issues.

■ Clapham Junction Station: Northern Line**Marsha De Cordova:**[\[18391\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has had discussions with the Mayor of London on the potential merits of connecting Clapham Junction station to the Northern line.

Simon Lightwood:

Government remains committed to supporting London and the transport network on which it depends. We recently provided £485m in funding to support Transport for London's (TfL) capital programme for 2025/26 and will continue to work with TfL to understand its capital funding needs, which will be considered at Phase 2 of the Spending Review. However, transport in London is devolved to the Mayor of London and TfL and it is for the Mayor to assess the merits of capital projects and make decisions on investment.

■ Cycleways: Cornwall**Ben Maguire:**[\[19596\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Camel Trail in North Cornwall to (a) Camelford and (b) beyond.

Simon Lightwood:

A feasibility study for this route has been funded through Shared Prosperity Funding, applied for by the local town council and Cornwall Council Community Area Partnership Lead. Sustrans, who manage the National Cycle Network, has put proposals to Active Travel England to undertake further development of the route in 2025, which will assess the potential merits of extending the Camel Trail to Camelford.

■ Delivery Services: Robots

Mike Reader:

[\[19574\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to support the use of autonomous last-mile delivery robots on pavements.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government has no current plans to legislate in this space. However, we are determined to seize the opportunities of emerging micromobility and tackle any negative impacts which may arise. We are actively monitoring the industry, new vehicle types, and new business models, and we will keep under review the case for legislative change.

■ Driving Licences

Calum Miller:

[\[19595\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to clear backlogs for driving licence renewal.

Lilian Greenwood:

There are no backlogs in driving licence renewal applications, which are being processed within published turnaround times.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)'s online services are the quickest and easiest way to renew a driving licence, with customers receiving their licence within a few days of a successful online application.

Driving licence applications where a medical condition must be investigated before a licence can be issued can take longer depending on the medical condition(s) involved and whether further information is required from third parties, for example doctors, other healthcare professionals or the applicant themselves.

■ Driving Tests

Alex Mayer:

[\[18740\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many DVSA delegated driving examiner training slots are scheduled for 2025.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is committed to the delegated examiner scheme and recognise the flexibility this provides with regards to heavy goods vehicles, passenger carrying vehicles and the emergency services in managing the availability of suitably qualified drivers.

DVSA are currently not able to provide plans for delegated training in 2025. DVSA are continuing to develop a training schedule for organisations who require delegated examiners. This approach will need to balance all of the demands on DVSA's training resource.

Alistair Strathern:

[19091]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department plans to take to reduce the backlog in driving tests.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's (DVSA) main priority is upholding road safety standards while it works hard to reduce car practical driving test waiting times.

Measures in place to reduce waiting times for customers at all driving test centres (DTC), include the recruitment of new driving examiners (DE), conducting tests outside regular hours, including at weekends and on public holidays, and buying back annual leave from DEs. DVSA also continues to deploy DEs from areas with lower waiting times into those where waiting times are longer.

The government is considering what further actions we can take to reduce waiting times for car practical driving tests.

Luke Taylor:

[19119]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will bring forward legislative proposals to criminalise the practice of bots reselling driving tests at inflated prices.

Lilian Greenwood:

To ensure fairness for everyone wanting to book a practical driving test, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) continues to work hard to combat the unscrupulous practice of reselling tests, often at significant profit. The agency encourages all customers to book a test through the official channel on GOV.UK where customers can book, change and cancel tests. The agency does not license any service to resell test slots.

DVSA operates an online booking service (OBS) for approved driving instructors (ADI) and trainers so that they can book and manage driving and riding tests for their pupils. DVSA has made changes to the OBS by stopping automatic online registrations to use the service, ensuring each company that registers employs an ADI and removing access for any companies not linked to driving instructors.

In January 2023, the DVSA changed the terms and conditions for using the booking service to help prevent anyone from selling tests at profit. Since then, the DVSA has issued 341 warnings, 785 suspensions, and closed 757 business accounts for misuse of its booking service.

DVSA is deploying enhanced bot protection to stop automated systems from buying up test slots unfairly.

DVSA's work in this area is ongoing and will continue to take steps to address these practices.

■ Driving under Influence: Drugs

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[\[19929\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 15346 on Driving under Influence: Drugs, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of amending section 5A of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to include an option for an evidential roadside saliva sample.

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.

■ Electric Vehicles

Charlotte Nichols:

[\[19406\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to introduce incentives for (a) manufacturers and (b) motorists to encourage take-up of electric cars.

Lilian Greenwood:

In the Autumn Budget the Government announced over £2bn of capital and R&D funding to 2030 that will support the latest research and development, accelerate commercial scale up, and unlock capital investment in zero emission vehicles, batteries and the wider supply chain. In addition, in 2025-26 Government is investing £200m to expand electric vehicle (EV) chargepoints, providing £120m for new electric van grants, and strengthening consumer incentives by widening the differentials in Vehicle Excise Duty First Year Rates between EVs and hybrids vs. internal combustion engine cars. EVs continue to get the best rates available for salary sacrifice schemes, which strongly incentivises the uptake of EVs.

■ Electric Vehicles: Safety

Mike Amesbury:

[\[19758\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment her Department has made of the safety of electric (a) cars, (b) bikes and (c) scooters.

Lilian Greenwood:

Road safety and the safety of electric vehicles is of paramount importance to the Government and is kept under regular review. The Government monitors road safety for all vehicles, these official statistics are regularly published on Department for Transport's website.

(a) All new cars require approval before they can be registered on the roads of Great Britain, to ensure they meet prescribed safety requirements.

(b) E-cycles are regulated under product safety laws and manufacturers must ensure they are safe and provide instructions for safe use before they are placed on the market. The Office for Product Safety and Standards, alongside Trading Standards, have the powers to remove unsafe or non-compliant products from the market.

(c) Safety is our top priority as we consider next steps and potential policy solutions for micromobility, including e-scooters

■ Heavy Goods Vehicles: Hydrogen

Josh Newbury:

[\[19096\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of the use of hydrogen for decarbonising heavy goods vehicles.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government is aware that hydrogen has a potential role to play in decarbonising heavy goods vehicles (HGVs).

The £200 million zero emission HGV and infrastructure demonstrator programme will demonstrate both battery electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles on UK roads alongside recharging and refuelling infrastructure. The programme will gather data for a 5-year demonstration period which will be released publicly throughout the duration of the programme.

■ Large Goods Vehicles: Concrete

Mike Amesbury:

[\[19764\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of making the temporary 38.4 tonnes and 44 tonnes weight arrangement permanent for volumetric concrete mobile plants.

Mike Amesbury:

[\[19765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential economic impact of not making the 38.4 tonnes and 44 tonne weight arrangement permanent for volumetric concrete mobile plants.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department ran a call for evidence from October to December 2023 seeking views on three potential options on weight limits for Volumetric Concrete Mixers (VCMs). Evidence was provided to the Department on both the pros and cons of allowing VCMs to continue to operate at higher weights. The Department has reviewed the evidence provided and will publish its findings. Any potential changes to the current policy position on VCM weight limits will need to consider the implications for road safety, infrastructure, the environment, and maintaining fair competition in the market.

■ Lawn Mowers: Petrol

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[19707\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether the Government ban on the sale of new petrol-fuelled vehicles from 2030 includes sit-on, petrol-fuelled lawnmowers for (a) domestic and (b) non-domestic use.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government's commitment is for the phase out of new cars that rely solely on an internal combustion engine from 2030. Petrol-fuelled lawnmowers are considered non-road mobile machinery and therefore would not be in scope of the commitment for either domestic or non-domestic use. The Government will set out further details on its proposals in due course.

■ M25: Runnymede and Weybridge

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[19041\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many noise important areas of the M25 there are within the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency; and what the location is of each.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[19042\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what information her Department holds on when each concrete section of the M25 within Runnymede and Weybridge constituency is expected to reach the end of its serviceable life.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[19043\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with National Highways on when each concrete section of the M25 within the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency will be treated with next generation concrete surfacing.

Lilian Greenwood:

The precise dates for treatment of individual sections will be determined based on regular monitoring of the condition of the carriageway. National Highways plans to give priority to treatments within the Noise Important Areas (NIA) identified by Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) which have not already benefitted from some noise mitigation.

Next Generation Concrete Surfacing is the second phase in the treatment of the M25 concrete sections to improve the condition and reduce noise. The first phase is the reinstatement of the transverse joints between the concrete slabs to their original width and profile.

National Highways plan to undertake works in two NIAs (1286 and 1287) with the first phase starting from February 2025 until March 2026, the second phase of works will be delivered using the next generation concrete surfacing during the 2026/27 financial year with the final phase being completed between junction 9 and 11 by end of 2029.

In regard to the question on the location of NIAs, there are nine identified NIAs within Runnymede and Weybridge constituency, these are:

NIA:5858	Elmbridge	On/north of M25 at Cobham at Horsley Road overbridge. KT11 3NY.
NIA:5859	Elmbridge	On/north side of M25 taking in 'The Lodge'. 1km east of Junction 10. KT11 1PH.
NIA:1286	Runnymede	North of main railway line, over Wey Navigation and B385. KT15 3NF.
NIA:1287	Runnymede	East of Row Town, Addlestone, south of Junction 11. Includes Church Road to the north to Coombelands Farm to the south. KT15 1NF.
NIA:5887	Runnymede	Immediately north of Junction 11. Northbound carriageway only. KT16 9PA.
NIA:13841	Runnymede	Located where the A320 crosses under M25. KT16 9LQ.
NIA:5885	Runnymede	On/west side of M25, north of Great Cockcrow (miniature) railway. KT16 0AA.
NIA:6262	Runnymede	Located immediately south of Junction 12, over main railway. KT16 9NL.
NIA:1295	Runnymede & RBWM	Whole length of carriageway from Junction 12 to Junction 13. TW20 8NU.

Lastly, the concrete carriageway on the M25 within the Runnymede and Weybridge constituency remains in good structural condition and will not require full replacement within the next 30 years. During that time work may be required to individual slabs, to reinstate joints and to restore the surface texture.

■ Mid-cheshire Line: Northwich and Manchester

Andrew Cooper: [\[18459\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the barriers are to delivering a half hourly service on the Mid Cheshire line between Northwich and Manchester.

Simon Lightwood:

I am aware of the aspiration for increased services on the Mid-Cheshire Line, and we will continue to discuss how additional services might be provided, with stakeholders including Transport for Greater Manchester and local MPs. Any increase in services would require additional infrastructure, including to address capacity constraints between Manchester Piccadilly and Stockport.

■ Motorways: Leeds

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19013\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the M621 Junction 1-7 enhancements.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19014\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A63 Castle Street improvement project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19015\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A19 Down Hill Lane RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19016\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A1 Birtley to Coal House RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19017\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A66 Northern Trans-Penning RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19018\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A585 Windy Harbour to Skippool RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19019\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the M60/M62/M66 Simister Island Interchange RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19020\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A61 Westwood Roundabout RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A5036 Princess Way RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19022\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the Mottram Moor Link Road and A57 Link Road RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19023\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A46 Newark Bypass RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19024\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the A38 Derby Junctions RP2 project.

Jerome Mayhew: [\[19025\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate her Department has made of the completion date of the M54-M6 Link Road RP2 project.

Lilian Greenwood:

The schemes in question are in different stages as follows:

Four schemes have been completed and are open to traffic.

SCHEME NAME	COMPLETION DATE
M621 Junction 1-7 Enhancements	Completed September 2024
A585 Windy Harbour to Skippool	Completed March 2024
A19 Down Hill Lane	Completed March 2022
A61 Westwood Roundabout	Completed February 2021

The following three schemes are in construction and expected completion dates as follows:

SCHEME NAME	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
A63 Castle Street Improvement	March 2026
A1 Birtley to Coal House	March 2025
Mottram Moor Link Road and A57 Link Road	2028

As the Chancellor informed Parliament on 29 July, an internal review of the Department's capital spend portfolio has been commissioned. The primary aim of the review is to provide strategic advice to the Secretary of State, which may in turn

inform decisions on specific projects as part of the multiyear Spending Review. Schemes below are subject to this review and therefore we cannot give any assurances around delivery of these schemes until the Spending Review concludes.

SCHEME NAME

A66 Northern Trans-Pennine

M60/M62/M66 Simister Island Interchange

A46 Newark Bypass

A38 Derby Junctions

M54-M6 Link Road

Finally, the A5036 Princess Way scheme was cancelled in the Autumn Budget 2024.

■ **Pedestrian Areas: Visual Impairment**

Dr Luke Evans:

[\[19403\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 23 October 2024 to Question 9263 on Pedestrian Areas: Visual Impairment, what recent discussions he has had with the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee on the (a) use and (b) safety of bus stop bypasses.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department is carefully considering options in developing next steps on bus stop bypasses. Active Travel England has been involved in those discussions as the executive agency of the Department with a remit to help deliver increases in walking and cycling. The Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee has also provided input, in their role as a statutory advisory body on disability transport issues.

■ **Pedicabs: Greater London**

David Taylor:

[\[19839\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with (a) the Mayor of London and (b) Transport for London on the potential impact of pedicabs in central London using pavements on the safety and wellbeing of pedestrians.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State for Transport has had no direct discussions with the Mayor of London or Transport for London (TfL) on this particular matter. However, the Department for Transport has recognised the need to regulate the Pedicabs industry in London through the passing of the Pedicabs (London) Act 2024. This legislation will be applied through regulations to be consulted on by TfL in 2025. We would expect TfL to take into account the safety and wellbeing of pedestrians throughout the consultation process.

David Taylor:

[\[19843\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with (a) the Mayor of London and (b) Transport for London on the potential impact of banning pedicabs in central London on (i) levels of congestion, (ii) pavement safety and (iii) safety of cyclists.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State for Transport has had no direct discussions with the Mayor of London or Transport for London (TfL) on this particular matter. However, the Department for Transport has recognised the need to regulate the Pedicabs industry in London through the passing of the Pedicabs (London) Act 2024. This legislation is not intended to ban the usage of Pedicabs in London, but to ensure that they are properly regulated. These prospective regulations will be now consulted upon by TfL in 2025, and we would expect TfL to take into account the various impacts of any pedicabs regulations on levels of congestion, pavement safety and the safety of cyclists throughout the consultation process.

■ **Pedicabs: Regulation**

David Taylor:

[\[19844\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with (a) the Mayor of London and (b) Transport for London on regulating pedicabs to ensure they comply with the Highway Code.

Simon Lightwood:

The Secretary of State for Transport has had no direct discussions with the Mayor of London or Transport for London (TfL) on this particular matter. However, the Department for Transport has recognised the need to regulate the Pedicabs industry in London through the passing of the Pedicabs (London) Act 2024. This legislation will be applied through regulations to be consulted on by TfL in 2025. We would expect TfL to take into account the Highway Code throughout the consultation process.

■ **Railway Stations: Holyhead**

Llinos Medi:

[\[19487\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with the Welsh Government on funding improvements to Holyhead train station.

Simon Lightwood:

No such discussions have taken place recently. Holyhead Station is managed by Transport for Wales who are answerable to Welsh Ministers. Regular discussions between the UK and Welsh Governments on rail improvements take place via the Wales Rail Board.

■ Railways: Fares

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[19251\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will hold discussions with train operating companies on the adequacy of rail fare structures for passengers.

Simon Lightwood:

While it is our ambition through public ownership to deliver a more affordable railway, any long-term changes or concessions made to rail fares policy require balancing against the potential impacts on passengers, taxpayers and the railway.

Through legislation, we will set out the role GBR will have in fares, ticketing, and other operational aspects of the railway. Fares and ticketing will continue to be the responsibility of train operators until Great British Railways is established.

■ Road Works: Fees and Charges

Lewis Cocking:

[\[R\] \[19801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to encourage local authorities to apply for lane rental schemes.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Department is in the process of updating its lane rental guidance and has recently announced a new assessment process for lane rental applications to improve and streamline the application process for authorities. We have been speaking to authorities directly as part of a series of regional visits and are also working with the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC) to develop their guidance for local authorities who are considering applying for a scheme.

■ Shipping: Exhaust Emissions

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[18898\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to review the implementation of the clean maritime plan in 2025.

Mike Kane:

Maritime has a key role to play in supporting the Governments missions, from clean energy, to growth, and supporting public health through tackling air pollution. We will shortly set out our next steps for reducing shipping emissions in a forthcoming maritime decarbonisation plan, which will include a package of policy and regulatory measures.

■ Space Technology: Small Businesses

Mr Calvin Bailey:

[\[18688\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's report entitled Regulatory Horizons Council: the Future Regulation of Space Technologies, published on 25 April 2024, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that small space businesses have regulatory guidance

from the Civil Aviation Authority that supports the (a) launch and (b) return of experimental (i) satellites and (ii) spacecraft.

Mike Kane:

We are working closely with Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology (DSIT), who we understand have met with the Regulatory Horizons Council (RHC) on their report published in April 2024. A formal response will be sent to the RHC in the new year.

To support the sector the CAA publish guidance setting out regulatory principles and how applicants can comply with the outcome focused legislation. Their guidance was last updated in May 2024.

The CAA also has regular, close engagement with the whole sector through Space Launch and Orbit Group (SPLOG), which provides the CAA opportunities to engage with operators to understand mission concepts and provide guidance on how to progress a licence application.

Working alongside the CAA, we will ensure we have legislation that is effective and globally competitive, through the use of a Regulatory Sandbox and a Post Implementation Review of the Space Industry Regulations 2021, commencing in January 2025.

Mr Calvin Bailey:

[\[18689\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the (a) clarity, (b) consistency and (c) timeliness of licensing assessments of launch and return activities for experimental satellites and spacecraft by the Civil Aviation Authority on the investment decisions of small space (i) start-ups and (ii) other businesses in the UK space sector.

Mike Kane:

The length of time that the Civil Aviation Authority, the independent regulator, takes for a licence application assessment is predicated on the heritage and maturity of the technology, and the quality of information provided by the applicant. The Government has implemented the Regulatory Innovation Office, which will reduce red tape and recognises the innovative technology developments in the space sector. Working alongside the CAA, we will ensure we have legislation that is effective and globally competitive, through the use of a Regulatory Sandbox and a Post Implementation Review of the Space Industry Regulations 2021, commencing in January 2025.

■ **Special Escort Group**

Nick Timothy:

[\[19468\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, on what statutory basis the Special Escort Group is able to disapply (a) highways and (b) speeding restrictions; and whether she has a statutory role in this process.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Special Escort Group have the same road traffic exemptions and powers to stop and direct traffic as any other uniformed police officers, where necessary in the execution of their duty.

■ Taxis: Electric Vehicles**Mr Louie French:**[\[19453\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans she has for the provision of funding for the plug-in taxi grant from April 2025 onwards.

Simon Lightwood:

The Plug-in Taxi Grant (PITG) was introduced in 2017 to support the early market growth of zero emission capable taxis. To date it has provided over £70 million to support the purchase of over 10,000 vehicles of this type.

The PITG is funded until at least the end of the current financial year. All grants and taxation measures remain under review to ensure they deliver the greatest value for money to the taxpayer.

■ Taxis: Greater London**Mr Louie French:**[\[19454\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department has had discussions with Transport for London on the potential implications for her policies of Transport for London's planned revised Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government sets the regulatory structure within which 263 licensing authorities in England license the taxi and private hire vehicle sector and issues guidance to assist them in doing this. Transport for London are the licensing authority for London and the Department discusses a range of taxi and private hire vehicle licensing matters with them.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Noah Law:**[\[19570\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled Summary of reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief, published on 30 October 2024, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of widening the consultation to consider (a) allowing relief on agricultural and business assets to roll over to a proprietor's surviving spouse, (b) decoupling agricultural property relief and business property relief and (c) determining a measure of agricultural trading income suitable for use as a threshold to allow agricultural property relief to be claimed.

James Murray:

The Government published information about the reforms to agricultural property relief and business property relief at

www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-property-relief-and-business-property-relief-reforms.

It is expected that up to around 2,000 estates will be affected by the changes to APR and BPR in 2026-27, with around half of those being claims that involve AIM shares. Almost three-quarters of estates claiming agricultural property relief (or those claiming agricultural property relief and business property relief together) are expected to be unaffected by these reforms.

The government will publish a technical consultation in early 2025. This will focus on the detailed application of the allowance to lifetime transfers into trusts and charges on trust property. This will inform the legislation to be included in a future Finance

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Banking Hubs**Mr Gregory Campbell:****[19250]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September 2024 to Question 4181 on Banking Hubs, when she expects the 350 banking hubs to be operational.

James Murray:

The Government is working closely with banks to roll out 350 banking hubs, which will provide individuals and businesses up and down the country with critical cash and banking services. The UK banking sector has committed to deliver these hubs by the end of this parliament.

■ Capital Investment: Economic Growth**Liam Byrne:****[18890]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what her target level of economic growth is from the overall level of capital spending in the next five years.

Liam Byrne:**[18891]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what metrics she plans to use to assess the value for money of capital spending allocated over the next five years.

Liam Byrne:**[18892]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what (a) metrics and (b) fiscal multipliers she plans to use to take allocation decisions for capital spending to Departments in the next five years.

Liam Byrne:

[18893]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of capital spending on economic growth in the next (a) five and (b) ten years, specifying (i) the fiscal multipliers targeted and (ii) the private sector investment included.

Darren Jones:

Economic growth is the number one mission of the government. Through the growth mission, the government will deliver a milestone of higher living standards in every part of the United Kingdom by the end of the Parliament.

Investment is a vital part of addressing the growth challenge. Autumn Budget began rebuilding Britain by increasing public investment and unlocking private investment. Public sector net investment will average 2.6% of GDP over the Parliament, with over £100 billion of additional capital investment over the next five years. This will strengthen the UK economy over the long term.

When making allocation decisions, the Treasury scrutinises individual capital spending proposals in line with the principles set out in the Green Book and Five Case Model, to ensure that they deliver value for money. It also considers these in line with the government's wider priorities, such as growth, and their overall deliverability and affordability.

The independent Office for Budget Responsibility produces regular and comprehensive forecasts on the impact of current government policies, including judgements about fiscal multipliers.

The OBR confirms that the Budget will have a positive impact on GDP in the next parliament and into the longer term from additional public investment. If sustained, the OBR judges the higher public capital spending, and the higher private sector investment this incentivises, could increase potential output by 0.4% after 10 years, and 1.4% in the long run.

■ Development Aid

David Chadwick:

[18476]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 22 July 2024 to Question 210 on Development Aid, what fiscal circumstances are required for the restoration of the Official Development Assistance budget to 0.7% of gross national income.

Darren Jones:

The Government remains committed to international development and restoring Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending to the level of 0.7 percent of GNI as soon as the fiscal circumstances allow. The ODA fiscal tests determine that a return to 0.7 percent of GNI is possible when the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR)'s fiscal forecast confirms that, on a sustainable basis, we are not borrowing for day-to-day spending and underlying debt is falling. Each year, the Government will review

and confirm, in accordance with the International Development (ODA Target) Act 2015, whether a return to spending 0.7% GNI on ODA is possible against the latest fiscal forecast. In the meantime, the UK remains one of the most generous donors of development assistance amongst the G7.

■ **Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation**

Sir Christopher Chope:

[18877]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Prime Minister's speech entitled Keir Starmer's speech on fixing the foundations of our country: 27 August 2024, whether she plans to increase compensation for people impacted by the regulatory maladministration of Equitable Life.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Equitable Life Payment Scheme has been fully wound down and closed since 2016 and there are no plans to reopen any decisions relating to the Payment Scheme or review the £1.5 billion funding allocation previously made to it. Further guidance on the status of the Payment Scheme after closure is available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equitable-life-payment-scheme#closure-of-the-scheme>.

■ **Financial Inclusion Committee: Public Appointments**

Sorcha Eastwood:

[18432]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of appointing a representative from Northern Ireland to the Financial Inclusion Committee.

Sorcha Eastwood:

[18433]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions she has had on the potential merits of appointing a Northern Ireland representative to the Financial Inclusion Committee.

Tulip Siddiq:

On 5 December, I convened a Financial Inclusion Committee which has been established to tackle the problems of financial exclusion. Through this committee, I will work with consumer groups and industry on the development of a Financial Inclusion Strategy.

This strategy must work for the whole of the UK. As such, I have written to my counterparts in Devolved Governments to update them on this work and extend the offer to input on an ongoing basis, both at ministerial and official level. More widely, we will be working closely with a number of organisations from across the UK, beyond the core committee, to ensure that the development of the strategy is informed by a range of perspectives and expertise.

■ Financial Services: Disadvantaged

Jess Asato:

[\[18436\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will take steps to ensure that (a) banks and (b) financial services providers increase access to (i) products and (ii) services through the Financial Inclusion Strategy.

Tulip Siddiq:

On 5 December, I convened a Financial Inclusion Committee which has been established to tackle the problems of financial exclusion. Through this committee, I will work with consumer groups and industry on the development of a Financial Inclusion Strategy.

This strategy will aim to tackle barriers to individual and households' ability to access affordable and appropriate financial products and services. This will include access to banking, credit and insurance.

■ Financial Services: Mortgages

Nick Timothy:

[\[18707\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the regulation of mortgage brokers.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), which is independent of Government, is responsible for the regulation of mortgage brokers in the UK. Mortgage brokers must either be authorised by the FCA or become an appointed representative of another firm that has the relevant permissions.

The FCA is also responsible for monitoring authorised firms, including mortgage brokers, to ensure they comply with its rules and has powers to take action if necessary.

■ Money Laundering

Stephen Gethins:

[\[18562\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether her Department is taking steps to strengthen anti-money laundering regulations.

Tulip Siddiq:

We are committed to ensuring the UK's anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing regime is both effective and proportionate. To that end, a consultation on improving the effectiveness of the Money Laundering Regulations closed in June 2024 and collected feedback on a range of potential changes to the Regulations. HM Treasury is currently analysing this feedback and the Government will publish a response in due course.

■ Money Laundering: Russia

Stephen Gethins:

[\[18563\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if her Department will provide guidance for businesses on the money laundering risks of transactions (a) directly and (b) indirectly linked to Russia.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Treasury and the Home Office hold joint responsibility for publishing a periodic national risk assessment which sets out the money laundering and terrorist financing risks in the UK. The national risk assessment provides guidance to regulated firms by informing them of risks and the jurisdictions that these risks may come from.

The UK National Risk Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing 2020 provided an outline of those jurisdictions assessed to be particularly relevant to the cross-border money laundering faced by the UK. This included an assessment of the money laundering risks linked to Russia.

The next UK National Risk Assessment is now underway, underpinned by a rigorous process in collaboration with law enforcement and other key stakeholders.

The UK has also issued red alerts to the financial sector and other regulated sectors on specific areas of high risk relating to Russia to inform and direct their scrutiny.

■ Public Expenditure: Northern Ireland

Jim Allister:

[\[19620\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the money the Government has promised to allocate to the public sector in Northern Ireland to enable it to pay for the increase in employer contributions to National Insurance from April 2025 will be allocated on the basis of Barnett consequentials.

Darren Jones:

At Autumn Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer agreed to provide funding to the public sector to support them with the additional cost associated with changes to Employer National Insurance Contributions policy.

The devolved governments will receive funding through the Barnett Formula in 2025-26 for any changes to UK Government department budgets, including support for Employer National Insurance Contributions. This is the normal operation of the funding arrangements as set out in the Statement of Funding Policy.

This funding will be in addition to the devolved governments' record Spending Review settlements for 2025-26, which are the largest in real terms of any settlements since devolution.

■ Public Sector: Re-employment and Workplace Pensions

Sojan Joseph: [\[19558\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing pension abatement rules on (a) public sector pensions and (b) re-employment earnings for public sector employees.

Darren Jones:

Pension abatement rules formed part of the overall design of most legacy Public Service Pension Schemes. These rules worked as part of an overall package to safeguard against undesirable practices and ensure propriety and value for money. Reformed schemes were introduced in 2014/15 and do not contain abatement provisions.

The government has no plans to review the abatement rules. It is generally not appropriate to retrospectively improve the terms of public service pensions, as this would place costs on current employers for benefits that were not envisaged at the time such pensions were accrued.

■ Research: Tax Allowances

Liam Byrne: [\[18889\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of R&D tax reliefs on (a) business investment and (b) economic growth.

James Murray:

The Government recognises the important role that research and development (R&D) plays in driving innovation and economic growth as well as the benefits it can bring for society.

Overall, R&D reliefs will support an estimated £56 billion of business R&D expenditure in 2029-30, a nearly 20 per cent increase from £47 billion in 2022-23.

The latest evaluations (“[Evaluation of the research and development tax relief for small and medium-sized enterprises](#)” and “[Evaluation of the research and development expenditure credit](#)”) were published in 2020 by HMRC and can be found on the gov.uk website. In the Corporate Tax Roadmap published at Autumn Budget, the government committed to periodically evaluating the R&D reliefs to ensure they are as effective as possible and underpinned by a credible, up to date evidence base.

■ Standard of Living

Andrew Cooper: [\[19531\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she plans to take to help improve living standards in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

James Murray:

The Government knows UK living standards, as measured by Real Household Disposable Income (RHDI) per capita, have not grown at the pace many would have hoped for in recent years. If it had grown at the same rate between 2010 and 2023 as it did between 1997 and 2010, it would have been £4,000 higher in 2023.

The Government is taking a comprehensive approach—supporting those in immediate need while addressing the structural changes necessary to fix the country's foundations. Boosting economic growth is the Government's top priority, underpinned with our ambition to raise the employment rate to 80%. To support those most in need, we have introduced a Fair Repayment Rate on debt deductions in Universal Credit and we have also extended the Household Support Fund in England, and Discretionary Housing Payments in England and Wales. Taken together, we will help families by boosting wages and putting more money in people's pockets.

At Autumn Budget 2024, the Government set out the next steps in delivering our strategy for regional growth through: devolution, investment and reform; empowering local leaders, rolling out integrated settlements which provide Mayors with more control over their funding; and investing in programmes important to growth, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This is ahead of wider local growth funding reform to be announced in the Spring. This will benefit people across the country, including in Cheshire, and the Mid Cheshire constituency.

■ Unemployment**Matt Vickers:**[\[18672\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on levels of unemployment.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Office for Budget Responsibility's October 2024 forecast, which takes into account measures announced in the Budget, expects the unemployment rate will fall to 4.1% next year and remain low until 2029.

WALES**■ Out of Area Treatment: Wales****Matt Bishop:**[\[19196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what steps she is taking with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to provide (a) guidance and (b) training to healthcare providers on Welsh health regulations when providing cross-border healthcare services.

Jo Stevens:

NHS Wales and NHS England have a Statement of Values and Principles that underpins the arrangements for treatment for patients living on the Wales England

border. This supports better patient outcomes and avoids fragmentation of care for those people living either side of the border. Further detail on the statement is in the link below.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/cross-border-statement-of-values-and-principles.pdf>

WORK AND PENSIONS

■ [Subject Heading to be Assigned]

Luke Akehurst:

[901816]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of young people out of work, education and training in North Durham constituency.

Alison McGovern:

We published new analysis alongside the Get Britain Working White Paper which shows that there are 45,000 young people out of work, education and training across the North East.

Those young people are being failed.

The data is not robust enough to be broken down further at constituency level, but our Youth Guarantee will ensure everyone aged 18-21 in England can access quality training, educational opportunities or help to find work - wherever they live.

Josh Simons:

[901817]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what progress she has made on implementing the proposals in the Get Britain Working white paper.

Andrew Western:

We are getting on with delivery. Fundamental reform will be delivered through:

- Transformation of jobcentres to support people into and on in work.
- Working with local areas to tackle economic inactivity.

A Youth Guarantee for 18-21's in England to benefit from education, training or help to find work.

Douglas McAllister:

[901818]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what progress she has made on implementing the proposals in the Get Britain Working white paper.

Andrew Western:

We are getting on with delivery. Fundamental reform will be delivered through:

- Transformation of jobcentres to support people into and on in work.
- Working with local areas to tackle economic inactivity.

A Youth Guarantee for 18-21's in England to benefit from education, training or help to find work.

Mr Richard Quigley:

[\[901819\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of young people out of work, education and training in Isle of Wight West constituency.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Robust data on the number of young people out of work, education and training is not available at a constituency level.

This Government is committed to supporting young people through the DWP Youth Offer and new Youth Guarantee, alongside launching Skills England and a new National Jobs and Career Service.

Helen Maguire:

[\[901820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to help mitigate the impact of increases in the cost of living on disabled people.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The extra costs disability benefits are not means-tested, paid regardless of any income or savings and worth up to £9,580 a year, tax free.

They were uprated by 6.7 per cent from April and will be uprated by 1.7 per cent from next April subject to Parliamentary approval.

Kate Osamor:

[\[901821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what recent progress the Child Poverty Taskforce has made on developing strategies to help reduce child poverty.

Alison McGovern:

Tackling the terrible state of child poverty in this country is our priority every day and the Taskforce is looking at every lever we can pull across Government to do this.

The Taskforce has already heard from charities, experts and families and will publish its strategy in the Spring.

■ Carers' Benefits

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[19623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will review the eligibility rules for carer's benefits to enable more carers to combine paid work and unpaid care.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Unpaid carers play a vital role in supporting the elderly, disabled relatives or friends. Sometimes unpaid carers will need to turn to the benefit system for financial support, so it is right that we keep Carer's Allowance under review, to see if it is meeting its objectives, and giving unpaid carers the help and support they need and deserve.

The Government has announced that from April 2025 the weekly Carer's Allowance earnings limit will be pegged to the level of 16 hours work at the National Living Wage (NLW) and in future it will increase when the NLW increases. This means that unpaid carers will be able to earn up to £196 per week net earnings and still receive Carer's Allowance compared to £151 now. This means that an additional 60,000 unpaid carers will gain eligibility for the benefit between 2025/26 and 2029/30.

This important change reduces a work disincentive inherent in the current Carer's Allowance earnings system, but, as the Chancellor said at the Budget, we also need to look at the current "cliff edge" earnings rules. A taper, for example, could further incentivise unpaid carers to do some work. It could also reduce the risk of significant overpayments. However, introducing a taper in Carer's Allowance is not without challenges and could significantly complicate the benefit as it currently stands and would mean a significant rebuild of the Carer's Allowance computer system. DWP has begun some scoping work to see whether an earnings taper in Carer's Allowance might be a feasible option in the longer term.

Many carers who are receiving Carer's Allowance and doing some work will also be receiving Universal Credit. For those receiving Universal Credit, the 55% taper rate and any applicable work allowance will help to ensure that people are better off in work.

■ Education and Employment: Young People

Dan Carden:

[\[18384\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Youth Guarantee on young people in Liverpool Walton constituency.

Alison McGovern:

In the Get Britain Working White Paper, the Government announced £45 million of funding for eight trailblazers in England to test delivery of the Youth Guarantee. Liverpool City Region are one of the eight areas set to receive a proportion of this funding to support 18-21 year olds access education, training and employment opportunities in their area.

Working closely on the detail of the design and delivery in the Liverpool City Region, we will be able to maximise the difference it makes to young people's lives locally. Further analysis will be available through the course of the trailblazer.

■ Energy: Social Tariffs

Ann Davies:

[\[19526\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero on data matching to establish a social tariff for vulnerable customers.

Andrew Western:

Data matching is being used effectively to provide financial help with energy bills to over three million households this winter through the Warm Home Discount.

DWP officials are working closely with the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero and the cross-government Child Poverty Taskforce to explore options for enhanced data sharing and data matching to support the future development of policy to reduce fuel poverty.

Health and Safety Executive: Equality**Sir John Hayes:**[\[18882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Health and Safety Executive.

Sir Stephen Timms:

There are 1.3 full time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff employed by the Health and Safety Executive. Their remit extends beyond the equality, diversity and inclusion specialty, encompassing areas such as health, safety and wellbeing and includes occupational health, accessibility requirements and assessing potential equality risk factors.

Jobcentres: Liverpool Walton**Dan Carden:**[\[18382\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Get Britain Working White Paper on the services provided by Jobcentres in Liverpool Walton constituency.

Alison McGovern:

The reforms to Jobcentres across Great Britain that we have announced in the recent Get Britain Working White Paper will be transformative.

Key to the White Paper's successful delivery will be ensuring it is locally responsive and engaged. This will mean it will operate differently in different areas to reflect local systems and needs.

We will work closely with key partners, including Mayoral Combined Authorities, as we design, develop and test the new service into the next year. These tests will help us discover how we can shape a local service, while the UK Government maintains overall accountability for it.

Personal Independence Payment**Richard Burgon:**[\[19365\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to take steps to reduce the clearance time for mandatory reconsiderations of Personal Independence Payment decisions.

Richard Burgon:

[\[19366\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the mandatory reconsideration process.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Whilst we aim to make the right decision as early as possible in the claim journey, Mandatory Reconsideration is a key element of the Department's decision-making process. It offers customers an opportunity to challenge decisions and provide any additional information which may be relevant to their claim.

We recognise that the most recent data shows an increase in Mandatory Reconsideration clearance times, from 37 calendar days in December 2023 to 71 calendar days in July 2024. To address this, we are recruiting Mandatory Reconsideration Decision Makers and have made overtime available to increase productivity.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Children**

Shivani Raja:

[\[18712\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to review the two child benefit cap.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Child Poverty Taskforce is exploring how we can harness all available levers to reduce child poverty before publishing a strategy in Spring 2025.

■ **Social Security Benefits: Fraud**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[18345\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to tackle online sites advising people to claim for sickness and disability payments they are not entitled to.

Andrew Western:

DWP collaborates with government partners, including Action Fraud, City of London Police (CoLP) and National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) to identify malicious sites that impersonate the department, enable fraudulent activity or target DWP customers. DWP investigates sites hosting potentially malicious content to assess for fraudulent activity. Sites assessed as a potential threat to DWP and its customers, are referred to the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (part of the CoLP) who triage and assess for potential takedown within a 28-day period.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

DEFENCE

■ Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Expenditure

James Cartlidge:

[\[17841\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the cost has been of (a) capital and (b) non-capital expenditure on (i) HMS Albion, (ii) HMS Bulwark, (iii) HMS Northumberland, (iv) RFA Wave Knight and (v) RFA Wave Ruler in each of the last five financial years.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 13 December 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Maria Eagle:

A breakdown of the costs requested is set out below in the attached table.

	19/20		20/21		21/22	
	Non-Capital	Capital	Non-Capital	Capital	Non-Capital	Capital
	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M	£M
HMS Northumberland	-	-	-	-	-	-
HMS Albion	0.3	-	0.4	-	0.4	-
HMS Bulwark	-	-	-	-	-	1.2
RFA Wave Knight	2.0	1.4	3.9	9.9	1.6	-
RFA Wave Ruler	2.5	0.1	2.0	-0.1	2.0	-
	22/23		23/24			
	Non-Capital	Capital	Non-Capital	Capital		
	£M	£M	£M	£M		
HMS Northumberland	-	-	-	5.5		
HMS Albion	-	-	-	-		
HMS Bulwark	-	28.0	-	28.3		

	22/23		23/24	
RFA Wave Knight	2.0	-	0.9	0.1
RFA Wave Ruler	2.7	-	2.4	-

Attachments:

1. PQ 23860 kh amends sds - [Table NEW-13 Dec.docx](#)

HOME OFFICE

■ Asylum: Temporary Accommodation

Chris Philp: [\[19369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has identified alternative accommodation to enable a reduction in the use of hotels to house asylum seekers.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 16 December 2024. The correct answer should have been:

Dame Angela Eagle:

This Government inherited an asylum system under unprecedented strain, with thousands stuck in a backlog without their claims processed. **We remain committed to reducing the costs of asylum accommodation, including ending the use of hotels over time, and we will set out further details of our progress towards those objectives in the normal way in due course.**

~~We remain absolutely committed to ending the use of hotels to ensure value for money. The latest quarterly migration statistics show that at the end of September 2024, the number of asylum seekers in non-hotel accommodation had increased by 5% since the end of June 2024.~~

~~We have identified a range of sites that we are narrowing down to a handful of suitable properties that will enable us to exit hotels sooner.~~

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets

Minister for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets (Justin Madders):
[\[HCWS311\]](#)

Royal Mail is an iconic national institution, and this government will ensure it continues to be one. Since taking office in July, the Secretary of State and I have been clear that the government would robustly scrutinise the proposed takeover of Royal Mail, and ensure there are safeguards for its future.

Whilst the takeover bid is still ongoing and subject to the relevant ongoing regulatory processes, this statement is to update the House on the legally binding undertakings that have now been given to government by the bidder – EP Group. This does not mark the conclusion of the takeover, and these undertakings will only become effective if the takeover goes through.

Should the takeover complete, I am pleased to confirm that the Department for Business and Trade has secured significant commitments to promote the long-term and financially sustainable future of Royal Mail in the United Kingdom.

It may be helpful to set out where Royal Mail was at the time the takeover bid was announced. In its financial year 2023-24 Royal Mail recorded an operating loss of £348 million. At the same time Royal Mail had not met its quality of service targets as set by the independent regulator, Ofcom. Royal Mail's performance for the 2022/23 financial year resulted in a £5.6 million fine.

Whilst the previous government were happy to accept decline, this government has worked closely with EP Group to secure significant commitments to deliver transformation of Royal Mail into a sustainable service and hardwired in stronger protections for Royal Mail's identity.

My department's objectives when these discussions with EP Group began were to firstly strengthen the financial sustainability of this iconic and important British institution. Secondly, we wanted to protect the customers, workers and brand of Royal Mail.

The Department for Business and Trade has agreed unprecedented commitments from the potential buyer of Royal Mail to protect its long-term future and to recognise its position in the UK's national life.

Significantly, EP have committed to issue the Department for Business and Trade with a 'Golden Share' in Royal Mail for certain matters. This means that (except in very limited circumstances) the Department for Business and Trade can now prevent Royal Mail from moving its headquarters abroad or moving its tax residency without the government's permission. This is an entirely new measure which was not in place at the time of Royal

Mail's privatisation, and it will remain in place in perpetuity, including where there is a subsequent change in ownership of Royal Mail in the future.

I want to be clear that this will not change any of the government's role in the day-to-day running of the business; Royal Mail remains a private entity.

In addition to this Golden Share there are several other commitments made by EP Group to the Department for Business and Trade. These include:

- i. A number of financial commitments to guard against value extraction and introduce a set of requirements to strengthen Royal Mail's finances including the implementation of a balance sheet restructuring which will remove a significant intra-group debt which is currently due to the remainder of the IDS group.
- ii. There is a commitment from EP Group to ensure that Royal Mail has the financial means to fund the transformation of its business in the three year period following completion of the acquisition.
- iii. Royal Mail has consistently not met its targets set by Ofcom. Recognising this, there will be a commitment such that EP Group cannot extract value from Royal Mail Group until it can both afford to do so, and provided that it has achieved specific performance targets.

I am placing copies of the deed in the libraries of both Houses.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Capacity Market December Publications

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Energy) (Michael Shanks):
[\[HCWS314\]](#)

I am tabling this statement to inform members of three publications relating to the Capacity Market. The publications consist of a consultation on improvements to Capacity Market Rules and treatment of consumer-led flexibility in the Capacity Market; a Call for Evidence inviting further views on improvements to consumer-led flexibility in the Capacity Market; and a statutory report summarising the Capacity Market's performance over the last five years.

This government has committed to delivering clean power by 2030 and accelerating progress towards net zero, whilst ensuring the security of supply. Making Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030 is one of the Prime Minister's five missions. To deliver this mission, we will increasingly rely on renewable power. The government has set targets to double onshore wind, treble solar and quadruple offshore wind by 2030.

Introduced in 2014, the Capacity Market provides Great Britain with its ultimate safeguard to ensure security of supply. It serves to ensure enough capacity is available to provide a reliable electricity supply during peak demand periods and system stress events. The funding provided through the Capacity Market incentivises investment in new and existing generation, interconnectors, batteries, and Demand Side Response mechanisms that

enable consumer-led flexibility to ensure sufficient available capacity when required. This capacity is acquired through annual auctions held at intervals four years ahead and one year ahead of its respective delivery years. The government regularly amends the Capacity Market prior to auction cycles to ensure it is cost-effective and meets broader strategic objectives such as clean power by 2030.

The transition to Clean Power will see changes in the patterns of energy production and consumption, with flexibility playing an increasingly important role. In October, we published a consultation and Call for Evidence exploring proposals to maintain security of supply and to enable flexible generation capacity to decarbonise. Today, we build upon this work by publishing a consultation and Call for Evidence on proposals to modernise the Capacity Market Rules and improve consumer-led flexibility within the Capacity Market.

Consumer-led flexibility involves voluntary actions taken freely and directly by energy consumers to shift their electricity use. This includes residential customers using smart technologies such as smart-charging EVs and heat pumps, as well as Industrial and Commercial units adjusting demand and utilising behind-the-meter generation or storage. This enables consumers to be rewarded with cheaper electricity by flexibly adjusting their usage to times of lower demand on the grid.

The consultation sets out policies to streamline how consumer-led flexibility, delivered by Demand Side Response mechanisms, participates in the Capacity Market. As participation in the Capacity Market from aggregated domestic Demand Side Response portfolios increases to enable increased consumer-led flexibility, it is important that Capacity Market Rules are updated to better incorporate and enable access from emerging technologies which can respond flexibly to times of high energy demand. It also seeks views on the introduction of a termination fee for new Demand Side Response mechanisms which fail to demonstrate agreed capacity, improving delivery assurance to enable the Capacity Market to fulfil its central principle of ensuring security of supply.

The consultation also outlines proposals on Capacity Market Rule improvements. The Capacity Market Rules govern how the Capacity Market operates. It is integral that the Rules are clear and consistent in their operation to ensure the market remains accessible for new entrants seeking to invest in new sources of capacity. The consultation outlines proposals to improve the accessibility and clarity of the Capacity Market Rules to ensure greater understanding and adherence to them. The proposed changes will enable Capacity Market Units to change their Opt-out status following a change in their operational circumstances and will remove Rules on transitional and Coronavirus arrangements which are no longer required. These changes should ensure the Capacity Market Rules remain fit for purpose and continue to allow new, innovative technologies to participate in the Capacity Market without facing unnecessary administrative hurdles. The proposed changes also extend a policy to allow existing generators to use data older than 24 months to prequalify for auctions held in 2026. This will further increase auction competitiveness and lower the costs of the Capacity Market on consumers' energy bills.

The Call for Evidence seeks views on potential changes to the Capacity Market to improve consumer-led flexibility. It builds on proposals laid out in the Capacity Market

Phase 2 consultation which was published in October 2023 to invite views on how the Demand Side Response mechanisms that enable consumer-led flexibility could be better categorised and integrated into the Capacity Market. It also seeks feedback on how these mechanisms can be better supported through improved portfolio management, whilst maintaining the high levels of delivery assurance expected within the Capacity Market.

Finally, we have published the second statutory Five-year review, covering the years 2019 to 2024 of the Capacity Market's performance (referred to as the 'Ten-year review'). This review provides a summary of how the Capacity Market has performed against its original objectives. It draws on evidence gathered from a government-commissioned independent process and impact evaluation of the Capacity Market scheme in September 2021 and responses to a Call for Evidence published in October 2023.

The review has taken place as the government considers larger strategic questions through the Review of Electricity Market Arrangements programme, whose remit includes how a future Capacity Market can meet government objectives on security of supply. The review does not seek to pre-empt the outcomes of the Review of Electricity Market Arrangements.

These publications consider actions to improve accessibility to and functionality of the Capacity Market, while continuing to uphold its primary objective of ensuring security of supply. As the Capacity Market reaches its ten-year milestone as a key pillar at the heart of the government's strategy for ensuring security of electricity supply in Great Britain, these proposals seek to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and continues to play a crucial role in achieving the Clean Power mission.

■ Clean Power 2030 Action Plan

Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): [\[HCWS313\]](#)

On Friday 13 December the Government published our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan. This is an important step towards delivering the Prime Minister's mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower, by achieving clean power by 2030 and accelerating to net zero across the economy and follows on from his Plan for Change speech this December.

We are undergoing a significant transformation of our energy system, and this transition needs to accelerate to meet the Government's 2030 clean power goal, secure the economic opportunities it presents, and respond to the wider challenges presented by our ageing energy infrastructure. Our plan will play a critical role in delivering this acceleration, unlocking billions of pounds of private investment.

It outlines the most ambitious reforms to Britain's energy system in a generation to make our country energy secure, protect households from volatile international fossil fuel markets, reindustrialise the country with thousands of skilled jobs, and tackle the climate crisis. This plan will provide the foundation for the UK to build an energy system that can bring down bills for households and businesses for good.

Earlier this year the National Energy System Operator (NESO) published their independent, expert advice on delivering clean power by 2030. The Government's plan

builds on that advice, outlining our view of the pathway to 2030 clean power and the steps needed to get there. The plan covers both individual technologies and the cross-cutting enablers of deploying them, such as planning, grid, supply chains and skills.

Key measures in the plan include cleaning up the grid connections queue by prioritising the most important projects and ending the “first-come-first served” system; speeding up decisions on planning permission by empowering planners to prioritise critical energy infrastructure; and expanding the renewable auction process to stop delays and get more projects connected.

The plan has been developed in partnership with interested Departments, the Devolved Administrations and other parts of the public sector such as Ofgem and NESO. A dedicated Clean Power Commission, made up of experts from across industry, has also informed the plan, alongside broader industry engagement.

This ambitious plan marks a significant step forward for the Government’s clean energy mission. We are committed to continuing to work in close partnership with stakeholders to deliver it.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ English Devolution

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon):
[\[HCWS316\]](#)

Today, I am pleased to announce that the Government has laid the English Devolution White Paper.

The number one mission of this government is to relight the fire of our economy and ignite growth in every region. But we have an economy that hoards potential and a politics that hoards power – England is one of the most centralised developed countries, with too many decisions affecting too many people made by too few.

To truly get growth in every corner of the country and raise living standards, as set out in the government’s ambitious Plan for Change, we must rewire England and end the hoarding in Whitehall by devolving power and money from central government to those with skin in the game.

That means empowering Mayors to drive growth and ending the patchwork approach to devolution. But it also means rebuilding and reforming local government as the foundation for devolution, a reset in the relationship between central and local government, and giving communities stronger tools to shape the future of their local areas.

To do this, we will bring forward a landmark English Devolution Bill when parliamentary time allows. In advance of the Bill, we have today laid the English Devolution White Paper.

Deepening and widening devolution in England

At its core, the White Paper sets out how the Government will strengthen and widen the mayoral model of devolution across England. Mayors are uniquely placed to drive growth. They can use their mandate for change to take the difficult decisions needed to drive growth; their standing and soft power to convene local partners to tackle shared problems; and their platform to tackle the obstacles to growth that need a regional approach.

To equip Mayors with the tools they need to deliver, we will:

- Provide unprecedented powers and budgets for Mayors, via our enhanced devolution framework. This will include:
 - o A clear and transparent route for Mayors to access integrated funding settlements over time. Starting with Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Liverpool City Region, and the North East, this is a consolidated budget across housing, regeneration, local growth, local transport, skills, retrofit, and employment support.
 - o New powers over strategic planning and control of grant funding for regeneration and housing delivery, putting our regions at the centre of the drive to build 1.5 million homes in this Parliament.
 - o Devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills functions and supported employment funding to Mayors, as well as a substantive role in future employment support that is additional to core Jobcentre Plus provision. Mayors will take on joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model and will have a crucial role in ensuring there are clear pathways of progression from education into both further and higher education and local employment opportunities.
 - o A statutory role for Mayors in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network, with an additional right for the most established Mayors to request devolution of services, stations and infrastructure.
 - o A strengthened role for Mayors in relation to business support, boosting exports and attracting international investment.
 - o Moving Mayoral Strategic Authorities to simple majority voting, including the Mayor's vote, wherever possible, because unanimity is not in the best interests of getting houses built or growing the local economy.
- Reform and join up public services, to help services deliver for citizens and reduce the number of politicians. One of the simplest and most effective means to do this is bottom up, through place. So the government will: transfer Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) responsibilities to Mayors where boundaries align; explore the possibility of a single Mayor taking on PCC and FRA responsibilities across two or more authorities where this would result in coterminous boundaries; establish an expectation that Mayors are appointed to Integrated Care Partnerships and are considered for the role of Chair or Co-Chair; and announce a long-term ambition to align public service boundaries,

including Job Centres, police, probation, fire, health services, and Strategic Authorities. Through these measures, Strategic Authorities will be positioned as convenors on public service reform, working in partnership with Local Authorities.

- Hardwire devolution into government, because, for too long, the priorities of places have been ignored. New forums, like the Prime Minister's Council of Nations and Regions, and statutory Local Growth Plans, which dovetail with the government's National Industrial Strategy, will hardwire local areas into the way the UK government operates, enabling every corner of the country to play its part in delivering the Government's Plan for Change.
- Establish 'devolution by default'. Devolution in England has been ad hoc and inconsistent, with it being too unclear what powers places can access, when and how. The government will legislate to set out which powers go to which type of authority. The most far-reaching and flexible powers will be for areas with Mayors, because they provide the most visible and accountable form of local leadership. This is the floor of our ambition, not the ceiling, so we will enable our most mature institutions to request and pilot new functions to drive innovation.

As we widen devolution, our goal is simple. Universal coverage of strategic authorities in England. These should be larger than individual councils, covering wider areas where people live and work, to utilise the benefits of economies of scale. Many places already have Combined Authorities that serve this role.

The government issued an invitation to places without devolution to submit proposals in July. We have had constructive conversations with a range of areas, including Cheshire and Warrington, Norfolk and Suffolk and others, about how devolution could support their ambitions.

The government will shortly set out its Priority Programme for devolution – which will be for areas that are willing to progress devolution to an accelerated timescale, and to plan for inaugural mayoral elections in May 2026. The government will continue to develop proposals for new strategic authorities collaboratively and in partnership with local areas. However, to ensure that everyone in England can benefit from devolution and ensure the effective running of public services, the government will legislate for a ministerial directive, allowing the creation of strategic authorities where absolutely necessary, and after due time has been allowed, local leaders have not been able to agree. This goes hand-in-glove with our partnership approach to local government reorganisation. Taken together, this will mean fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents.

Delivering devolution at every scale

Everyone – from regional Mayors leading strategic economic policy, to frontline councillors convening their communities – needs the tools and trust to deliver change. That is why the White Paper is a vision for putting power in the right places and repairing the foundations of local government.

Councils are the foundation of our state – critical to driving growth, delivering and reforming the local public services people rely on, and to our democratic system. But local government has not been empowered to live up to its potential and people have suffered as a result. We will rebuild local government after 14 years of mismanagement and decline, so that it is fit, legal and decent. This means fairer funding and multi-year financial settlements, as we committed to in the local government finance policy statement in November. The initial consultation on the principles of this funding reform will be launched later this week. The public being able to hold councils to account for decisions means ending micromanagement from central government – so we will reform the use of wasteful competitive and ringfenced funding pots and rationalise funding for service delivery into the Local Government Finance Settlement wherever possible; streamline and rationalise reporting requirements; and review requirements for Local Authorities to seek Secretary of State consents for the use of their powers.

We will establish a genuine partnership between central and local government, recognising the vital role of local councillors as frontline community convenors, and executive members and leaders as partners in delivering the Government's missions and Plan for Change. This includes delivering 1.5m homes, with upper tier local authorities coming together to deliver strategic planning where there is not a strategic authority in place, underpinned through provisions in the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

And, because unitary councils can lead to better outcomes for residents, save significant money which can be reinvested in public services, and improve accountability with fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents, we will facilitate an ambitious programme of local government reorganisation. This programme will cover two-tier areas and unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality public services. Reorganisation should not delay devolution, and we will take a phased approach to delivery, including prioritising areas where reorganisation can unlock devolution.

Too many of our towns, villages and neighbourhoods have been left behind by economic change and have been let down by struggling public services. We will empower communities with new rights and levers to drive change and regenerate their neighbourhoods, and protect cherished community assets, introducing a new Community 'Right to Buy' for assets of community value. We have also retained the Long-Term Plan for Towns and will reform it into a new regeneration programme. We will enhance local authorities' powers, enabling them to address the challenges facing their areas. This will include strengthening councils' ability to take over the management of vacant residential properties and to introduce large selective licensing schemes to improve conditions in the private rented sector, without requiring Secretary of State approval.

Upgrading the systems

Finally, we will secure devolution for the long-term, strengthening accountability and building capacity. We deliver improvements to the accountability system for devolution, including an outcomes framework for Integrated Funding settlements, so it remains fit for purpose as we devolve more powers and funding, and improve external scrutiny of local

public spending, such as reforms to the local audit system and local government standards and oversight. To build capacity at all levels, we will ensure the right people are available for the job, seconding out from central government if needed, while ensuring Mayors are focused on their role and can empower their team to deliver.

Next steps

I have engaged closely with England's regional Mayors, via our new Mayoral Council, and local authorities, via our new Leaders Council, and will continue to do so as we roll out this ambitious programme. When parliamentary time allows, we will bring forward the English Devolution Bill, which will help us deliver on the vision set out in the White Paper and on our commitment to empower communities to take back control from Westminster, so we can work in partnership to drive growth and ensure people across the whole country benefit.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ Online Safety Act Implementation

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle):

[[HCWS312](#)]

Today, the government has reached two significant milestones in the implementation of the Online Safety Act ('the Act'), marking an important step forward in creating a safer online environment for all UK citizens. Today, I am laying in Parliament Ofcom's first draft codes of practice for the illegal content duties and draft Regulations setting out the threshold conditions for Category 1, 2A and 2B services under the Act.

1. Ofcom's draft illegal content duties codes of practice

The illegal content duties apply to all regulated user-to-user and search services under the Act, no matter their size or reach. These include new duties to have systems and processes in place to tackle illegal content and activity. Ofcom, as the independent regulator for this regime, is required to set out measures in codes of practice that providers can take to fulfil these statutory duties. Ofcom has now submitted to me the drafts of its first codes of practice for the illegal content duties to lay these in Parliament for scrutiny. If neither House objects to the draft codes, Ofcom must issue the codes and the illegal content duties will come into force 21 calendar days later. Once the Codes have come into force, the statutory safety duties will begin to apply to service providers, and Ofcom will be able to enforce against non-compliance.

Ofcom has also published its guidance on how providers should carry out risk assessments for illegal content and activity. Providers now have three months to complete their illegal content risk assessment.

The completion of the risk assessments should coincide with the codes of practice coming into force if they pass the statutory laying period. Ofcom's codes will set out steps service providers can take to address identified risks. The draft codes will drive significant improvements in online safety in several areas. They will ensure service providers put in

place effective systems and processes to take down illegal content, including for content that amounts to terrorism, child sexual abuse material (CSAM), public order offences, assisting suicide, intimate image abuse content and other offences. They will make it materially harder for strangers to contact children online, to protect children from grooming. They will significantly expand the number of services that use automated tools to detect CSAM. They will make it significantly easier for the police and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to report fraud and scams to online service providers. And they will make it easier for users to report potentially illegal content.

The draft codes are a vital step in implementing the new regime. Ofcom fully intends to build on these foundations and has announced plans to launch a consultation in spring 2025 on additional measures for the codes. This includes consulting on how automated tools can be used to proactively detect illegal content, including the content most harmful to children, going beyond the automated detection measures that Ofcom have already included. Bringing in the codes will be a key milestone in creating a safer online environment for UK citizens as the duties begin to apply and become enforceable.

1. Categorisation thresholds

Services which are ‘categorised’ under the Act will have additional duties placed on them. This is on top of the duties which all regulated user-to-user and search services must comply with to tackle illegal content and, where relevant, to protect children from content that is legal but nonetheless harmful to them. The additional duties will vary depending on whether a service is designated Category 1 (large user-to-user services), Category 2A (large search services) or Category 2B (smaller categorised user-to-user services).

In making these Regulations, I have considered factors as required by the Act. Amendments made during the passage of the Act, changed the consideration for Category 1 from the “level of risk of harm to adults from priority content that is harmful to adults disseminated by means of the service” to “how easily, quickly and widely regulated user-generated content is disseminated by means of the service.” This was a significant change and, while I understand that this approach has its critics who argue that the risk of harm is the more significant factor, this is the position under the Act.

Ofcom advice and the Secretary of State’s decision on threshold conditions

The Act required Ofcom to carry out research within six months of Royal Assent, and to then provide the Secretary of State with advice on the threshold conditions for each of the three categories. This research included a Call for Evidence so that stakeholder feedback could be considered in Ofcom’s advice.

After considering Ofcom’s advice and subsequent clarificatory information in public letters, I have decided to set threshold conditions for categorisation in accordance with Ofcom’s recommendations. I am satisfied that Ofcom’s advice, which was published in March, is the culmination of an objective, evidence-based process. I have taken this decision in line with the factors set out in Schedule 11 of the Act. I have been very clear to date, and want to reiterate, that my priority is the swift implementation of the Act’s duties to create a safer online environment for everyone. I am open to further research in the future and to update thresholds in force if necessary.

I appreciate that there may be some concerns that, at this time, threshold conditions have not been set to capture so-called ‘small but risky’ services by reference to certain functionalities and characteristics or factors. My decision to proceed with the thresholds recommended by Ofcom, rather than to take the approach of discounting user number thresholds, reflects the fact that any threshold condition created by the government should take into account the factors as set out in the Act, be evidence-based and avoid the risk of unintended consequences.

I also welcome Ofcom’s statement that it is keenly aware that the smallest online services can represent a significant risk to UK citizens, that it has established a dedicated ‘small but risky’ supervision taskforce and that it will use the tools available under the Act to identify, manage and enforce against such services where there is a failure to comply with the duties that all regulated services will be subject to. This includes enforcement powers: to impose penalties on service providers of up to 10% of qualifying worldwide revenue or £18 million (whichever is greater); to require services to take remedial action; and in certain cases, to apply to court for business disruption measures to be taken against service providers.

As Secretary of State, my priority is timely implementation of the Act to ensure that the additional duties are enforceable as soon as possible. Ofcom’s recently updated implementation roadmap sets out the expectation that it aims to publish the register of categorised services in Summer 2025 and will launch transparency reporting within a few weeks of publication of the register. This timeline is contingent on the Regulations for categorisation thresholds being approved by Parliament without delay.

Proportionality

Many of the additional duties for categorised services have proportionality as a relevant consideration. For example, in determining what is proportionate for the user empowerment content duty, the findings of the most recent user empowerment assessment are relevant which includes the incidence of relevant content on the service, in addition to the size and capacity of a provider. When producing its guidance and codes of practice Ofcom will have regard to the principle of proportionality. In line with Ofcom’s recommendations, we have made it clear in the Regulations that services are not captured under Category 1 if they use a content recommender system which only recommends to a user their own content.

Threshold conditions

Following Ofcom’s advice and having taken into account matters as required by the Act, I have therefore today laid draft Regulations which are intended to give effect to the following threshold conditions for each category of service:

The Category 1 threshold conditions are met by a regulated user-to-user service where, in respect of the user-to-user part of that service, it:

- has an average number of monthly active United Kingdom users that exceeds 34 million and uses a content recommender system, OR

- has an average number of monthly active United Kingdom users that exceeds 7 million, uses a content recommender system and provides a functionality for users to forward or share regulated user-generated content on the service with other users of that service.

The Category 2A threshold conditions are met by a search engine of a regulated search service or a combined service where it:

- has an average number of monthly active United Kingdom users that exceeds 7 million, and
- is not a vertical search engine (a search engine which only enables a user to search selected websites or databases in relation to a specific topic, theme or genre of search content).

The Category 2B threshold conditions are met by a regulated user-to-user service where, in respect of the user-to-user part of that service, it:

- has an average number of monthly active United Kingdom users that exceeds 3 million and provides a functionality for users to send direct messages to other users of the same service.

TREASURY

■ Statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves):

[\[HCWS315\]](#)

Today I can inform the House that I have asked the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) to prepare an economic and fiscal forecast for publication on 26 March 2025.

This forecast, in addition to the forecast that was published in October 2024, will fulfil the obligation required by the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011 for the OBR to produce at least two forecasts in a financial year.

I intend to respond to the March forecast with a parliamentary statement. This is in line with my commitment to deliver one major fiscal event a year, to give families and businesses the stability and certainty they need and, in turn, to support the government's growth mission.