



Daily Report

Tuesday, 17 December 2024

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 17 December 2024 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:33 P.M., 17 December 2024). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

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

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

ANSWERS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ **Brexit: Economic Growth**

Dr Roz Savage:

[\[19615\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what recent assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of (a) leaving the EU single market and (b) ending free movement with the EU on economic growth; and if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of rejoining the EU single market.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

We are resetting the relationship with our European friends to strengthen ties and tackle barriers to trade. But we've been clear that there will be no return to the single market.

Hearing from businesses about how they have been impacted by Brexit and how the relationship with the EU can be improved is key. In addition to formal channels such as the UK TCA Domestic Advisory Group and Civil Society Forum, my ministerial colleagues, officials and I have been engaging directly with businesses including through round table events with industry leaders.

■ **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership**

Andrew Griffith:

[\[19434\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has met with his counterparts from (a) Canada and (b) Mexico on the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Ministers regularly meet with their counterparts to discuss a wide range of key issues. The Secretary of State met with Canada's Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Mary Ng at the G7 and the G20. I met with Minister Ng at the ASEAN Summit in September and at the CPTPP Commission meeting in November 2024, where I also had the opportunity to meet the Mexican Under Secretary of Economy, Luis Rosendo Gutierrez Romano.

We will continue to work with our Canadian and Mexican counterparts to push for ratification of our accession so that businesses can begin to reap the rewards of this trade agreement.

■ **Consumer Goods: Finance**

Greg Smith:

[\[19038\]](#)

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 consumer goods sector.

Gareth Thomas:

The Chancellor has been clear that the government had to take difficult decisions in budget. To fix the foundations of the economy and provide a platform for growth.

Government is focused on its five-point plan to breathe life back into Britain's high streets supporting the consumer goods sales in particular. We understand how important the high street is to our businesses which is why our plans include tackling retail crime, ensuring a level playing field between online and high street businesses, stamping out late payments and ending the blight of empty spaces. The government is creating a fairer business rate system and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support business and boost opportunities.

The Small Business Strategy Command Paper, which we will publish next year, will set out our plan to boost scale-ups, grow the cooperative economy, create thriving high streets, make it easier to access finance, help break into overseas and domestic markets, build business capabilities, and provide a strong business environment.

■ Electric Vehicles: Manufacturing Industries**Mr Connor Rand:**[\[18757\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what the criteria are for automotive companies to access the support for transition to electric vehicles announced in the Budget.

Sarah Jones:

The Budget committed over £2 billion to 2030 for zero emission vehicle manufacturing and their supply chains. Government will engage with industry as we take forward these plans, and further details will be set out in due course as part of the Industrial Strategy. In the meantime, investors can continue to apply to the Automotive Transformation Fund and Advanced Propulsion Centre R&D programmes.

The Budget also confirmed £120 million in grants supporting the purchase of new zero-emission vans and wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Eligibility is assessed on a vehicle-by-vehicle basis. Updates on other grants will be provided in due course.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: North of England**Alison Griffiths:**[\[19974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to support foreign direct investment in the north of England.

Sarah Jones:

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) promotes and supports investment opportunities across all of the UK. We are scaling the Office for Investment to become the UK's full investment promotion function providing support to our most important international and domestic investors and help turn the Industrial Strategy and regional growth plans into a clear and commercially credible pipeline of investment opportunities.

For the North of England specifically, we will continue to collaborate with Mayoral Combined Authorities and local partners to showcase investment opportunities across the region to potential investors and to work with them to deliver transformative investment.

■ **Hospitality Industry: Finance**

Greg Smith:

[\[19040\]](#)

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 hospitality sector.

Gareth Thomas:

Hospitality businesses are at the heart of our communities and vital for economic growth. Following the budget I have met extensively with hospitality sector stakeholders including a meeting of the Hospitality Sector Council where we discussed the budget

The Government is creating a fairer business rate system, reducing alcohol duty on qualifying draught products and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support business and boost opportunities. All of these measures have been consistently demanded by the sector.

This work will be supported by the publication of The Small Business Strategy Command Paper next year.

■ **Import Duties: USA**

Andrew Griffith:

[\[19952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to prepare for the potential imposition of trade tariffs by the US.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

The Government has not speculated on what President-elect Trump may or may not do when he is in office.

The Government will continue to make a strong case for open, transparent, and free trade. We are an open trading economy, and we benefit from that in our trading relationships other countries, including the US.

■ **Overseas Investment: Colombia**

Ellie Chowns:

[\[18798\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement provisions of the UK/Colombia: Bilateral Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investments on the (a) natural environment and (b) rights of indigenous peoples.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

I refer the Hon. Member for North Herefordshire to my response to Question 12968 on 12th November 2024.

■ Post Offices: Franchises**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:****[19031]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if the Government will take steps to ensure Crown Post Office Staff will not be (a) made redundant and (b) moved to roles with (i) poorer working conditions and (ii) lower pay after their branches are franchised.

Gareth Thomas:

No decisions regarding Crown, or 'Directly Managed' Branches, have been taken.

Any decisions on staffing are a matter for Post Office but we would expect any changes to be carried out in line with due process, including engagement and consultation.

One of the central aims communicated within Post Office's recently announced transformation plan was to prioritise postmasters, including increases in postmaster pay.

■ Postal Services: Lincolnshire**Sir John Hayes:****[18487]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure that people in (a) South Holland and the Deepings constituency and (b) Lincolnshire are able to access essential postal services.

Gareth Thomas:

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

■ Retail Trade: Finance**Greg Smith:****[19039]**

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 retail sector.

Gareth Thomas:

The Chancellor has been clear that the government must take difficult choices. This was a budget to fix the foundations of the economy, and these tough decisions are intended to provide a platform for growth.

Government is focused on its five-point plan to breathe life back into Britain's high streets. We understand how important the high street is to our businesses which is why our plans include tackling retail crime, ensuring a level playing field between online and high street businesses, stamping out late payments and ending the blight

of empty spaces. The government is creating a fairer business rate system and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support business and boost opportunities.

Through the Retail Sector Council, we are addressing strategic issues for the sector related to high street regeneration, skills and sustainability. This work will be supported by the publication of The Small Business Strategy Command Paper next year.

■ Service Industries: Finance

Greg Smith:

[\[19037\]](#)

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 professional services sector.

Gareth Thomas:

The Chancellor has been clear that the government had to take difficult decisions in budget. To fix the foundations of the economy, and provide a platform for growth.

The government is creating a fairer business rate system and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support business and boost opportunities.

Through the Professional and Business Services Sector Council, we are addressing strategic issues for the sector. In addition, Professional and Business Services is one of the Industrial Strategy's growth-driving sectors. We will work with businesses to co-create a Professional and Business Services Sector Plan which will identify key barriers to growth and describe how government and industry intend to achieve long-term growth for the sector.

■ Stellantis

Andrew Griffith:

[\[19953\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets attended any of the meetings held by his Department with Stellantis.

Sarah Jones:

I refer the member for Arundel and South Downs to the answer I provided to UIN 17527 on 6 December.

■ Trade Agreements: India

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[\[19287\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, when trade talks with India will commence.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Following a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Modi on 18 November, the Prime Minister announced that UK-India trade talks will relaunch in the new year.

Wera Hobhouse:

[\[19378\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if he will take steps ensure that the intellectual property chapter in a free trade agreement with India includes commitments to the (a) UN Sustainable Development Goals, (b) International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and (c) UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Following a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister on 18 November, the Prime Minister announced that UK-India trade talks will relaunch in the new year.

While we do not comment on the details of negotiations, work is underway across government to prepare for negotiations with India and to seek a deal that delivers for the UK and supports economic growth.

Our trade programme, including talks with India, is driven by stakeholder engagement and seeks to support the high existing standards within our own domestic Intellectual Property Regime and as agreed in international fora.

■ US Chamber of Commerce

Dame Harriett Baldwin:

[\[19679\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has met with the US Chamber of Commerce.

Mr Douglas Alexander:

Ministers meet regularly with business organisations and trade associations. Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations and individuals are published quarterly on GOV.UK. The most recent return was published on 28 November and the next one will be published by the Spring.

CABINET OFFICE

■ 10 Downing Street: Staff

Alicia Kearns:

[\[19408\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many people worked in the No. 10 foreign policy team on (a) 31 October 2024 and (b) 11 December 2024.

Georgia Gould:

For management and staffing purposes the Prime Minister's Office is part of the Cabinet Office. All staff in the Prime Minister's Office support the work of the Prime Minister to ensure the effective running of government.

■ **Cabinet Office: Alcoholic Drinks**

Cat Smith:

[\[19340\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in his Department have met since July 2024.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published shortly.

■ **Cabinet Office: Employment Agencies**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[19129\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much each Department has spent on recruitment agencies in each of the last five years.

Georgia Gould:

The information is not centrally held centrally. Each department is responsible for its own recruitment expenditure, which includes any agency spend.

■ **Civil Servants: Workplace Pensions**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[19130\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the cost to the public purse was of civil service pensions in each of the last ten years.

Georgia Gould:

The answer to the question raised is available in the public domain and can be found in the Civil Superannuation accounts on the UK Government website and the resources section of the Civil Service Pension website.

■ **Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Official Visits**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18670\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13327 on DCMS: Official Visits, when he plans to announce when he plans to publish the (a) Q1 and (b) Q2 transparency data.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

Quarterly transparency data for 1 April to 30 June 2024 was published on 28 November 2024. Quarterly transparency data for 1 July to 30 September 2024 will be published shortly.

■ Foreign Investment in UK: National Security

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[\[18896\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to amend the National Security and Investment Act 2021 to enhance the scrutiny of acquisition of entities that may pose national security risks.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

The National Security & Investment Act 2021: Annual Report 2023-2024- published in September shows that the National Security and Investment system is continuing to operate well to protect sensitive sectors whilst continuing to support investment.

The Government is taking a number of steps to ensure the continued effectiveness of the NSI Act.

- The previous government published a Call for Evidence in November 2023 and a response in April 2024. The Call for Evidence sought feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on the scope of the regime, the notification process and government guidance and comms. The Government is currently considering its next steps, drawing on responses received.
- The Government will also review and produce a report on the Notifiable Acquisition Regulations 2021, which set out the areas of the economy in scope of the National Security and Investment Act's mandatory notification requirements, as required by section 4 of the Notifiable Acquisitions Regulations.
- The Government will complete a Post-Implementation Review, as committed to in the NSI Act Impact Assessment, evaluating the effectiveness of the NSI Act. This is expected to be published in 2026.

■ Government Departments: Consultants

Jon Trickett:

[\[18886\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much was spent on consultants across Government Departments in (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

Jon Trickett:

[\[18887\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how much his Department spent on consultants in (a) 2023 and (b) 2024.

Georgia Gould:

Consultancy spend across government is not centrally held and is held by each department.

Cabinet Office spend on consultants is published in the Annual Reports and Accounts which are available on gov.uk.

■ Government Departments: Employment Tribunals Service

Helen Hayes:

[\[17142\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the total cost to the public purse was of out of court settlements for employment tribunal cases across Government in each of the last five years.

Georgia Gould:

The total cost of special payments for the Cabinet Office, which includes - but is not limited to - any out of court settlements for Employment Tribunals is provided in the department's annual report and accounts each year, which is published on gov.uk.

■ Government Departments: Social Media

Josh Fenton-Glynn:

[\[18822\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, how many Departments have social media accounts by social media platform; and how much each Department spent on social media (a) subscriptions and (b) advertisements on each social media platform in each of the last three years.

Georgia Gould:

Departmental social media accounts and subscriptions are not centrally managed.

As with any media planning approach, channels are selected based on their ability to engage with relevant audiences in alignment with the government's strategic objectives.

The Cabinet Office is consistently tracking and reviewing spending on communications to ensure efficiency and that the appropriate strategy is implemented. We will not spend more than is needed to be effective and ensure best value for the taxpayer.

■ Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review

Liam Byrne:

[\[19634\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11837 on Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review, if he will set out for each review (a) the planned timeline for completion and (b) whether the findings will be published.

Liam Byrne:

[\[19635\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11837 on Integrated Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy Review, if he will set out for each of those reviews (a) the process for establishing the evidence base and (b) whether it will be undertaken (i) internally and (ii) include external consultation.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

In relation to my answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11837, the aforementioned reviews are scheduled to conclude in the first half of 2025. Decisions about publication and consultation are matters for the relevant department owners.

The Cabinet Office owns the resilience review which will conclude in Spring 2025 and will set the future direction for the resilience system. It is an internally-led review which will draw on existing evidence to inform what is working well and what could change, including the findings from the Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 and the Grenfell Inquiry. In addition to regular discussions with stakeholders, Ministers and officials are continuing to meet with those from devolved, regional and local Government, businesses and civil society.

■ National Security Adviser: Pay**James Cartlidge:**[\[19728\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the remuneration package is for the National Security Adviser.

Georgia Gould:

Information about the remuneration of special advisers will be published in the Annual Report on Special Advisers.

All special advisers are employed under the terms of the Model Contract for Special Advisers, available on GOV.UK.

■ Public Bodies: Conflict of Interests**Lloyd Hatton:**[\[19166\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the National Audit Office's report entitled Managing conflicts of interest: value for money, published on 22 November 2024, whether the Government plans to introduce central electronic registers for all public bodies.

Georgia Gould:

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

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

■ Storms**Dr Neil Hudson:**[\[19078\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps he is taking to support people affected by Storm Darragh.

Ms Abena Oppong-Asare:

As I said to the House on 10 December, Storm Darragh brought strong winds to the UK late last week, and saw a RED weather warning issued for wind covering parts of

England and Wales. The Government immediately took action to prepare for the arrival of Storm Darragh. Ahead of the storm, we issued an emergency alert to over 3 million people in affected regions under a red weather warning, urging them to stay indoors. That was the largest use of the early warning system outside of a test scenario.

The Storm resulted in impacts affecting a number key services and infrastructure including power supply, transport, and telecoms. Power outages caused over two million customers to lose their electricity supply. Although the majority of customers had their power restored very quickly, our priority continues to be on ensuring that every household without power is reconnected as quickly as possible. Engineers for the National Grid and other network operators are working to ensure all possible steps are being taken to re-connect the small number of remaining customers off supply. The latest information they have provided is that remaining customers will be reconnected by the end of this week.

Over 10,000 properties were protected from flooding, however, support is being provided by the Environment Agency and local authorities to the small number of households impacted by flooding.

Although the Storm has passed, the Government will continue to follow the recovery efforts and the work of local responders who are supporting communities affected by the Storm and will ensure that lessons identified are used to further improve our resilience to severe weather.

I am grateful for the response from local resilience forums around the country. I praise our emergency responders and utility workers, who have worked so hard in difficult conditions to help the public manage the impacts of the storm.

■ **Sue Gray**

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[18210\]](#)

To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when Sue Gray's employment as a special adviser ended.

Georgia Gould:

Sue Gray's employment as a special adviser ended on 6 October 2024 following her resignation that day.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Gambling: Taxation**

Jim Dickson:

[\[19926\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to her Department's press release entitled Statutory levy and online slot stake limits to be introduced to tackle gambling harm, published on 27 November 2024, what steps she plans to take to monitor the spending of the 30% of levy funding allocated for prevention.

Stephanie Peacock:

As set out in the Government's [response](#) to the consultation on the statutory levy, the levy will for the first time provide dedicated, statutory investment for prevention activity in the gambling space. This could include a range of projects and services to increase awareness of risks and prioritising early intervention measures. To guarantee sufficient accountability and transparency within the new system, including the use of funding allocated for prevention alongside research and treatment, we will establish appropriate governance arrangements consisting of a Levy Board for the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments to monitor the health and impact of the levy system, and an Advisory Group to provide informal advice to lead commissioning bodies regarding strategic and funding priorities. The UK government will also formally review the statutory levy system within five years with the first formal review expected by 2030.

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme**Ruth Jones:**[\[19770\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how many representations her Department has received from (a) organisations, (b) hon. Members and (c) individuals on the future of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

Chris Bryant:

Between the beginning of September 2024 and Friday 13th December, the department has received 323 items of correspondence on the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme: 119 from organisations; 119 from hon. and rt. hon. Members; and, 85 from individual members of the public.

Nightclubs: Closures**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18962\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the number of nightclub closures in the UK since 2020.

Chris Bryant:

The government recognises the vital role night-time economy business plays in supporting local economies and our communities. Healthy night-time economy businesses play a key role in supporting our creative industries, including musicians, DJs and performance artists, as well as supporting tourism and strengthening day economy businesses.

The government is creating a fairer business rate system and has extended RHL relief at 40% for 2025-26. Beyond this, the government intends to introduce permanently lower tax rates for retail, hospitality, and leisure (RHL) properties from 2026-27. This reform, on which a Discussion Paper was published at Autumn Budget 2024, will provide certainty for businesses regarding their bills. The government is

also reducing alcohol duty on qualifying draught products and transforming the apprenticeship levy to support businesses including in the nighttime economy.

Following the Autumn Budget, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has confirmed it will continue to support Arts Council England's (ACE's) successful Supporting Grassroots Music Fund which provides grants to grassroots music organisations - including those that host or promote electronic music – such as venues, rehearsal and recording studios, promoters and festivals. ACE continues to engage with industry through targeted webinars and events to promote the Fund to the club sector and encourage applications.

■ Press Freedom

Nick Timothy:

[R] [19954]

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact on the freedom of the press of the recent IPSO ruling in relation to a complaint made by Juno Dawson against the Spectator newspaper.

Stephanie Peacock:

The Government is committed to protecting press freedom, which is essential to a strong and functioning democracy. In the UK, there exists an independent, self-regulatory system for the press, which is crucial to maintain press freedom. It would therefore be inappropriate to comment on a specific ruling by IPSO, as an independent press regulator.

DEFENCE

■ Armed Forces Covenant

Ian Roome:

[R] [19122]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether a public sector organisation that has signed the Armed Forces Covenant may be removed as a signatory if the organisation has acted in contravention of the obligations and principles laid out in the Covenant.

Al Carns:

Organisations not fulfilling their pledge can have their Armed Forces Covenant status reviewed.

Concerns should initially be raised directly with the organisation in question, by following their standard complaints process. Complaints that remain unresolved can be referred by the complainant to the relevant ombudsman.

Enquiries and complaints about Covenant signatories can also be directed to the Ministry of Defence via: afcovenant@rfca.mod.uk

■ Armed Forces: Housing

James Cartlidge: [\[18969\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many individual Service Family Accommodation properties will have received a damp and mould treatment (a) between 5 July 2024 and 10 December 2024 and (b) in the remainder of the current financial year.

James Cartlidge: [\[18971\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many individual Service Family Accommodation properties will have received new windows (a) between 5 July 2024 and 10 December 2024 and (b) in the remainder of the current financial year.

James Cartlidge: [\[18972\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many individual Service Family Accommodation properties will have received new external doors (a) between 5 July 2024 and 10 December 2024 and (b) in the remainder of the current financial year.

James Cartlidge: [\[18973\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many individual Service Family Accommodation properties will have received new double glazing windows (a) between 5 July 2024 and 10 December 2024 and (b) in the remainder of the current financial year.

James Cartlidge: [\[18974\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many individual Service Family Accommodation properties will have received new boilers (a) between 5 July 2024 and 10 December 2024 and (b) in the remainder of the current financial year.

James Cartlidge: [\[18975\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many individual Service Family Accommodation properties will have received new extractor fans (a) between 5 July 2024 and 10 December 2024 and (b) in the remainder of the current financial year.

AI Carns:

3,412 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties received a damp and mould treatment between 5 July and 10 December 2024. Data for the remainder of the current Financial Year (FY) cannot be provided as damp and mould is dealt with on a case-by-case basis and the department cannot predict the number of damp and mould reports in the future.

Data for windows cannot be provided on its own as windows form part of a wider project which includes the replacement of doors. 998 SFA received replacement windows and doors between 5 July and 10 December 2024. A further 991 SFA are due to receive new windows and doors by the end of FY 2024-25.

In addition to the 998 SFA which received new windows and doors as part of a separate project, a further 265 SFA received doors/patio doors during the period 5 July to 10 December 2024. As above, a further 991 SFA are due to receive new windows and doors the end of FY 2024-25.

All new window and door projects provide double glazed windows and doors. 1,263 SFA properties received double glazing and as above, a further 991 SFA are due to receive new doors and windows by the end of FY 2024-25.

298 boilers were installed from 5 July to 10 December 2024.

356 additional boilers are due to be installed by the end of FY 2024-25.

4,684 new extractor fans were fitted between these dates. Data for the remainder of the current FY cannot be provided as new extractor fans are dealt with on a case by case basis and the department cannot predict the number of new extractor fans that will be required in the future.

James Cartlidge:

[18970]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what types of damp and mould treatment are used for Service Family Accommodation.

Al Carns:

Damp and mould treatments used for Service Family Accommodation are specific to the severity level of the damp and mould at the property.

The treatments for each level can be found below:

- Level 1: Minor – wash and treat with mould inhibitor detergent.
- Level 2: Moderate - wash and treat with mould inhibitor detergent.
- Level 3: Severe localised – treatment is the First Responder Plus package which covers: wash and treat, decorate, gutter clearance, reseal windows, reseal basins and reseal bath.
- Level 4: Severe widespread – First Responder Plus package and dependent on severity, temporary relocation may be required.
- Level 5: Extreme - Immediate temporary relocation or permanent relocation if the damp and mould cannot be addressed within 10 days through a First Responder Plus package.

James Cartlidge:

[18976]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October to Question 1829, on Armed Forces: Housing, how many of the 600 home insulation improvements have (a) been completed before 14 October 2024 and (b) will be completed in the remainder of the financial year.

James Cartlidge:

[18977]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October to Question 1829, on Armed Forces: Housing, how many of the 1,000 long-term damp and mould remediations (a) were completed by 14 October and (b) will be completed in the remainder of the financial year.

James Cartlidge:

[\[18978\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October to Question 1829, on Armed Forces: Housing, how many of the 200 long-term empty home refurbishments (a) were completed by 14 October 2024 and (b) will be completed in the remainder of the financial year.

James Cartlidge:

[\[18979\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October to Question 1829 on Armed Forces: Housing, how many minor damp and mould improvement packages (a) were completed before 14 October 2024 and (b) will be completed in the remainder of the financial year.

James Cartlidge:

[\[18980\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October to Question 1829 on Armed Forces: Housing, how many upgraded heating solutions (a) were complete before 14 October 2024 and (b) will be completed in the remainder of the financial year.

Al Carns:

Of the 600 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) identified for insulation improvements, 491 SFA still have workers onsite with 109 out of the 600 completed. 42 of these were completed by 14 October 2024. All projects are currently expected to be completed before the end of Financial Year (FY) 2024-25.

13 Projects encompassing 1,219 SFA have been completed this FY (976 SFA were completed by 14 October 2024) although some of these SFA will have been completed last FY as projects usually last for a period of six-nine months. seven projects encompassing a further 603 SFA are ongoing - with project completion ranging from 80% to 99%. All are currently expected to be completed by the end of the FY 2024-25.

All but one of the remaining long-term empty home refurbishments were completed by 14 October 2024. The remaining home completed and handed over to the Service personnel on 29 November 2024.

4,314 SFA had improvement packages delivered by 14 October 2024. A further 899 damp and mould packages will be carried out over the next few months using existing funding meaning that 8,763 SFA will have received a damp and mould package of work in the last two FY's. The damp and mould historic backlog has now been cleared with only emergent and re-emergent cases needing to be addressed.

78 SFA have received heating replacement works this FY, all were completed by 14 October 2024. There are no plans within this FY to upgrade any further heating solutions.

■ Armed Forces: Recruitment

Mr Mark Francois: [\[19639\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17776 on Armed Forces: Recruitment, how the Army measures Capita's performance against key performance indicators in the Recruitment Partnering Programme contract; and what the results have been in each of the last five years.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[19640\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what specific actions were taken following the performance audit reviews of Capita's role in military recruitment in (a) May and June 2021 and (b) July and August 2023.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[19641\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17776 on Armed Forces: Recruitment, if his Department will publish the monthly measurements against key performance indicators for Capita's performance in military recruitment over the last five years.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[19642\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17776 on Armed Forces: Recruitment, whether Capita met its key performance indicators in each of the last five years under the Recruitment Partnering Programme contract.

Mr Mark Francois: [\[19643\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2024 to Question 17776 on Armed Forces: Recruitment, what financial penalties have been applied to Capita under the Recruitment Partnering Programme contract for failure to meet contractual performance standards in the last five years.

Luke Pollard:

The new Government inherited a crisis in retention and recruitment. We have made it a priority to address this with a series of work streams designed to increase recruitment and renew the contract between the nation and those who serve to improve retention. Recruiting and retention remain one of our highest priorities - the Army/Capita Recruiting Partnering Project is completely focused on delivering a significant increase in recruitment in 2024-25.

Working in a collaborative partnership, the Army and Capita have robust contract management measures, including Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and penalty deductions where KPIs are not met, to monitor performance against contractual requirements. However, as I am sure the right hon. Member will understand, detailed contractual arrangements, including performance measures, are not routinely disclosed by the Department in order to protect the commercial interests of all parties.

■ Ministry of Defence: Employers' Contributions**James Cartlidge:****[18984]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 4 November 2024 to Question 11939 on Ministry of Defence: Employers Contributions, how much of the cost of employer National Insurance contributions will be covered by additional direct funding from HM Treasury.

Maria Eagle:

His Majesty's Treasury has confirmed they will provide funding for the increased cost of National Insurance contributions for the Department. I will write to the hon. Member to confirm the amount once this has been finalised and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

■ Ministry of Defence: Recruitment**Rebecca Long Bailey:****[18945]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many private recruitment agencies his Department uses to fill senior vacancies; what the potential cost to the public purse is of these services; and what steps his Department is taking to monitor performance.

Al Carns:

To date in financial year 2024-25, there have been three permanent Senior Civil Servant (SCS) Payband 1 or 2 recruitment campaigns, and three SCS Payband 3 or 4 campaigns that have engaged a private sector Executive Search firm. The cost of these services is commercial-in-confidence so cannot be provided at this time.

Top Level Budgets in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) hold individual commercial contracts with Executive Search firms and are responsible for monitoring performance, with the MOD also overseeing this centrally.

■ National Armaments Director**James Cartlidge:****[19724]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Major defence reforms launched, with new National Armaments Director to tackle waste and boost industry, published on 25 October 2024, what the rank of the National Armaments Director will be.

James Cartlidge:**[19725]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Major defence reforms launched, with new National Armaments Director to tackle waste and boost industry, published on 25 October 2024, how the new National Armaments Director (NAD) role will defer in practice in their (a) duties and (b) responsibilities from the current NAD role.

James Cartlidge:

[19726]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Major defence reforms launched, with new National Armaments Director to tackle waste and boost industry, published on 25 October 2024, what the remuneration package will be for the new National Armaments Director role; and how that package will differ from the current one.

Maria Eagle:

The National Armaments Director (NAD) will be a Senior Civil Servant appointment.

Currently the Chief Executive Officer of Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) acts as the UK representative that is responsible for ensuring DE&S delivers the right equipment in line with NATO Conference of NAD (CNAD) requirements. Apart from continuing to be the UK representative on several NATO boards, all other responsibilities of the role will be new.

Recruitment of the future NAD is ongoing, and we expect to invite applications shortly. Details of the new NAD duties and responsibilities and the associated remuneration package will be available in the job description once published.

■ Skynet

James Cartlidge:

[19727]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 14 October 2024 to Question 6342 on Skynet, whether SKYNET 6A satellite procurement remains on schedule.

Maria Eagle:

Airbus Defence and Space has not changed their estimate for the launch date for the Skynet 6A satellite since the answer to Question 6342 was provided on 14 October 2024.

Attachments:

1. [Skynet](#) [6342 - Skynet.docx]

■ Strategic Defence Review

James Cartlidge:

[19375]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether he plans to publish his response to the Strategic Defence Review at the same time as the Spending Review.

Luke Pollard:

The Reviewers will make their final report to the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Defence Secretary in the first half of 2025. The Secretary of State for Defence will subsequently report the Strategic Defence Review to Parliament. Ahead of the final report, the reviewers will report regularly on progress to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Defence Secretary.

EDUCATION■ **Children: Temporary Accommodation**

Mike Amesbury: [18609]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what role Ofsted plays in ensuring the (a) safety, (b) wellbeing and (c) educational attainment of children living in temporary accommodation.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

■ **Class Sizes**

Tom Gordon: [19465]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average pupil-to-teacher ratio is in (a) Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency, (b) North Yorkshire and (c) nationally.

Catherine McKinnell:

Information on the school workforce, including the pupil to adult and pupil to teacher ratios at national, regional, local authority, parliamentary constituency (prior to 2023 boundary changes) and individual school level, is published in the 'School workforce in England' statistical publication, which is available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

In the 2023/24 academic year, which is the latest data available, the ratio of pupils to teachers (qualified and unqualified) in state-funded schools was 19.2 in Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency (2024 boundary), 18.0 in North Yorkshire local authority and 18.1 nationally in England.

■ **Foster Care: Recruitment**

Mike Amesbury: [18612]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to increase the number of foster carers in (a) England and (b) Cheshire.

Janet Daby:

This government is committed to working in partnership with local authorities to recruit more foster carers and committed an additional £15 million in the Autumn Budget 2024. This funding is to start work to ensure every local authority has access to a hub and to embed the existing regional fostering recruitment and retention hubs, covering 64% of local authorities in England. The hubs will transform the way people who are interested in fostering are supported and rollout the Mockingbird programme, which offers peer-support to foster carers and the children in their care. The department is also funding 'Fosterlink', a support service for local authority fostering

services not in the regional programme. This identifies areas for improvement and creates a national network to share best practice.

■ **Mandarin Language: Education**

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[18676\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will continue her Department's funding for the Mandarin Excellence Programme.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government remains committed to supporting the teaching of modern foreign languages in England's schools. Languages provide an insight into other cultures and can open the door to travel and employment opportunities. They also broaden pupils' horizons, helping them flourish in new environments. Having the opportunity to study a modern foreign language should be part of the broad and rich education that every child in this country deserves.

The department will continue to fund the Mandarin Excellence programme for the 2024/25 academic year.

The Spending Review settlements for 2025/26 were confirmed at Budget on 30 October and business planning is underway so that programmes can be given certainty about funding as soon as possible.

■ **Multi-academy Trusts: Accountability**

Mike Amesbury:

[\[18613\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take with local authorities to improve the (a) transparency and (b) accountability of multi academy trusts.

Catherine McKinnell:

Multi-academy trusts are partners in this government's vision to drive high standards across all parts of the education system. The government is committed to bringing forward legislation to enable the inspection of multi-academy trusts supporting this government's ambition that every part of the education system which can drive improvement is doing so.

It is important that multi-academy trusts work effectively with local authorities in the areas where their schools are located.

■ **Multi-academy Trusts: Accountability and Complaints**

Jack Rankin:

[\[18838\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to improve (a) management accountability and (b) the complaints and oversight system for staff at multi-academy trusts.

Catherine McKinnell:

All school staff should feel safe and supported at work, and confident in being able to report concerns. We expect school leaders, as employers, to take appropriate action to tackle any issues that are raised.

All school employers, including trusts, have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees. The primary duty to take reasonable care for the health and safety of all employees, including school leaders, rests with the employer. The employer is therefore responsible for doing what is reasonably practicable to ensure that employees are adequately supported in relation to wellbeing and should take appropriate action where they are aware of any matters that impact their employee's welfare. It is the responsibility of individual trusts to have robust staffing policies in place to ensure this is the case.

This includes having complaints guidance and whistleblowing policies and procedures in place. Guidance is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-an-academies-complaints-procedure/best-practice-guidance-for-academies-complaints-procedures> and here: <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing>.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Concerns can be raised with the department using the Customer Help Portal available here: <https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk>.

More widely, as Principal Regulator for academies, the Secretary of State is clear that accountability is non-negotiable. The department holds academies to high standards, setting and enforcing all non-financial standards, and facilitating, supporting and overseeing intervention in multi-academy trusts when it is needed.

Academy trusts are also bound by their funding agreements to conduct their academies within the terms and requirements of their Articles of Association, the Academies Trust Handbook and any legislation or legal requirement that applies to academies. Where concerns about an academy are identified or raised, the department works closely with trusts to ensure statutory requirements are being met.

■ Natural History: GCSE**Damian Hinds:****[18517]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she expects teaching of GCSE Natural History to begin.

Catherine McKinnell:

All young people should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum with a range of qualification routes and choices. The government is considering the next steps for a natural history GCSE.

The government has also established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE, an expert in education policy. The

review, which covers ages 5 to 18, will ensure that the curriculum appropriately balances ambition, excellence, relevance, flexibility and inclusivity for all children and young people. The review group will publish an interim report early in 2025 setting out their initial findings and confirming the key areas for further work. The final report with recommendations will be published in autumn 2025.

■ Pupils: Languages

Sir John Hayes:

[18486]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made a recent estimate of how many primary school children do not speak English as their first language.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department publishes information on whether a pupil is known to speak English as a first language or not. This data can be found in the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics' publication, based on the January 2024 school census. The most recent figures are accessible at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>. A pupil is recorded to have English as an additional language if they are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English. This measure is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration.

■ Pupils: Temporary Accommodation

Mike Amesbury:

[18608]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of living in temporary accommodation on the educational attainment of children at each of the key stages between early years and key stage 4.

Janet Daby:

Too often opportunity for children and young people is defined by their background and we know that disadvantaged young people face barriers to engagement with education, which can include practical barriers like insecure housing. If children are unable to engage with education, it doesn't matter how good teaching and learning is, they will not benefit.

The Opportunity Mission will break the link between young people's backgrounds and their future success, ensuring family security and providing the best start in life, with all children achieving and thriving and building skills for opportunity and growth.

The Ministerial Taskforce jointly chaired by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education will use all available levers to drive cross-government action on child poverty, starting with overseeing the development of our ambitious Child Poverty Strategy, which will be published in spring 2025.

From April 2025 we will be rolling out Family Help Services that will prioritise supporting the whole family and intervening at the earliest opportunity to prevent

challenges escalating. Lead practitioners will undertake assessments of all the needs of the family, including those who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness, and will work to support families where this may be part of a more complex set of needs.

The government has set up a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group which my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister chairs, bringing together Ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy to put us back on track to ending homelessness. As announced at the Autumn Budget 2024, funding for homelessness services is increasing next year by £233 million compared to 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.

More widely, we want a school system in which all children can achieve and thrive, no matter their background. This is why we have begun work to recruit an additional 6,500 expert teachers and launched an independent, expert-led Curriculum and Assessment Review that will look closely at the key challenges to attainment for young people, in particular those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

■ Schools: Disability

Dan Tomlinson:

[18819]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to promote the inclusion of disabled students in schools; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including in the national curriculum teaching about the life experiences of disabled people.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools to break down barriers to education, alongside ensuring that special schools can support children with the most complex needs.

The department will strengthen accountability on mainstream settings to be inclusive, including through Ofsted, support the mainstream workforce to increase their special educational needs and disabilities expertise, and encourage schools to set up resourced provision or special educational needs units to increase capacity in mainstream schools. This is being supported by an additional £740 million for high needs capital in 2025/26. Local authorities can use their high needs capital funding to deliver new places in mainstream and special schools, as well as other specialist settings. It can also be used to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings. High needs funding will also increase by almost £1 billion in 2025/26, compared to 2024/25.

The department has created an Expert Advisory Group for Inclusion, led by Tom Rees, to advise myself and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education on how to drive inclusive education practice.

Within a broad framework, set out in subject-specific programmes of study, schools currently have flexibility to organise the content and delivery of the curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils.

The government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE. The Review will ensure that the curriculum appropriately balances ambition, excellence, relevance, flexibility and inclusivity for all our children and young people.

■ Schools: Gender Based Violence

Dan Tomlinson:

[\[18820\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that (a) boys and (b) young men receive education in school on preventing violence against women and girls in schools.

Catherine McKinnell:

The government has pledged to halve violence against women and girls in the next decade. Education has a crucial role to play in tackling harmful behaviour, helping children and young people to develop empathy, boundaries and respect for difference.

Through compulsory relationships education, all pupils, including boys and young men, learn how to form positive and respectful relationships and develop an understanding the concepts and laws around sexual harassment and sexual violence.

The department is currently reviewing the relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) curriculum, including engaging with key stakeholders to look at how this can fully complement our wider actions to tackle violence against women and girls.

Separately, the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review will consider how RSHE fits into the wider curriculum.

■ Schools: Transport

Mike Amesbury:

[\[18611\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of travel provision for children to attend school when living in temporary accommodation.

Catherine McKinnell:

No child should be prevented from accessing education by a lack of transport. The department's home-to-school travel policy requires local authorities to arrange free travel for children of compulsory school age who attend their nearest school and would not be able to walk there because of the distance, their special educational needs, a disability or mobility problem, or because the route is unsafe. There are additional rights to free home to school travel for children from low-income households.

Children living in temporary accommodation may benefit from the continuity of remaining in their current school with familiar teachers and friends. They will not be eligible for free travel to that school if it is not the nearest school to their temporary accommodation, but local authorities have a discretionary power to arrange free home-to-school travel for children who are otherwise not eligible.

The department encourages local authorities to support vulnerable children and young people, and is working with local authorities to understand how well home to school transport supports all children to access educational opportunity.

■ Special Educational Needs

Cameron Thomas:

[18845]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help reduce the backlog of Education, Health and Care Plans in (a) Gloucestershire and (b) England.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department wants to ensure that, where required, education, health and care (EHC) plan assessments are progressed promptly and, if needed, plans are issued as quickly as possible so that children and young people can access the support they need.

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to assess whether children and young people have special educational needs that require an EHC plan. EHC plans must be issued within twenty weeks of the needs assessment commencing so that children and young people can access the support they need. In 2023, there were 138,200 initial requests for an EHC plan and 90,500 assessments took place. 50.3% of new EHC plans in 2023 were issued within twenty weeks.

The department knows that local authorities have seen an increase in the number of assessment requests and that more needs to be done to ensure that local areas deliver effective and timely services. This includes better communication with schools and families.

The department continues to monitor and work closely with local authorities that have issues with EHC plan timeliness. Where there are concerns about a local authority's capacity to make the required improvements, we help the local authority to identify the barriers and put in place an effective recovery plan. This includes, where needed, securing specialist special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) adviser support to help identify the barriers to EHC plan process timeliness and put in place practical plans for recovery.

A Joint Area SEND inspection was carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission between 11 to 15 December 2023 in Gloucestershire. Inspectors concluded the local area partnership's arrangements led to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people and identified a number of recommendations including increasing timeliness and quality of EHC plans. Leaders

in the local area have provided an improvement plan and an updated SEND strategic plan.

Officials and SEND advisors from both the department and NHS England meet regularly with Gloucestershire local area leaders from the local authority and integrated care board, parent representatives, education leaders and other partners to monitor progress against their improvement plan. As part of this work, there is also ongoing monitoring of Gloucestershire's EHC plans, on their timeliness, quality and clearance of any backlog.

To assist the local area, the department has deployed a SEND advisor to offer support and advice. Some of the advisor's work to date includes analysis of EHC plans data and trends, facilitation of best practice exchange from other regions, advice and guidance to enhance the quality of EHC plans.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Finance**

Rachel Hopkins:

[18680]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether Special Educational Need schools are eligible for split school site funding.

Catherine McKinnell:

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

Special schools for children with SEND are not funded using the same funding formula as mainstream schools. The extra costs of operating a special school across more than one site can be covered through the combination of place funding at £10,000 per place and top-up funding in respect of individual pupils attending the special school.

Our guidance, 'High needs funding arrangements', explains that the top-up funding determined by local authorities for a special school should not only reflect the costs of additional support to meet the individual pupil's needs, but can also reflect costs that relate to the facilities required to support all the pupils at the school, including factors such as the school being on a split site. The guidance can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>.

■ **Special Educational Needs: Hendon**

David Pinto-Duschinsky:

[18850]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans her Department has to improve SEND provision in schools in Hendon.

Catherine McKinnell:

This government's ambition is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the right support to succeed, where possible in mainstream schools.

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

Barnet are also one of the lead local authorities in the Change Programme, which is helping test and develop the government's proposals for improving the SEND system.

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

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

■ Writing**Damian Hinds:****[18518]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment has she made of the potential merits of writing by hand in learning to write lessons.

Catherine McKinnell:

The department supports the development of strong writing skills at each stage of children's education and development.

In the early years foundation stage (EYFS), it is important for children to develop their fine motor skills in order to write and allow children to communicate effectively. The level of development children should be expected to have reached by the end of the EYFS is defined by the early learning goals (ELGs). As per the 'fine motor skills' ELG, for a child to reach the expected level of development at the end of the EYFS, they must be able to 'hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing - using the tripod grip in almost all cases'. The writing ELG states that children at the expected

level of development will 'write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed' and 'write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others'.

As part of the current national curriculum, pupils must learn how to form letters correctly and confidently, choose the writing implement that is best suited for a task and receive frequent, discrete and direct teaching. No one particular handwriting style is recommended and schools are free to decide themselves how they teach handwriting. Eventually, pupils are expected to write fluently, legibly and quickly. During key stage 2, joined handwriting should be the norm, with pupils using the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understanding which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left not joined.

High and rising school standards are at the heart of this government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best life chances. The government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review which will seek to deliver, amongst other things, an excellent foundation in core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. The review group will publish an interim report early in 2025 setting out their interim findings and confirming the key areas for further work. The final review with recommendations will be published in autumn 2025. In the meantime, the department is continuing to consider any further steps that should be taken to best support the teaching of writing in schools.

■ Young People: Temporary Accommodation

Mike Amesbury:

[\[18610\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the number of young people who have previously lived in temporary accommodation entering (a) further and (b) higher education.

Janet Daby:

The department does not hold information on the number of people who have previously lived in temporary accommodation before entering further education or higher education.

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ Boiler Upgrade Scheme

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[19745\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of including hybrid heat pumps as an available measure under the Boiler Upgrade Scheme.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The aim of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme is to support the transition away from fossil fuel heating to a low carbon alternative. Hybrid heat pumps are not eligible as the department wants to direct the funding available to technologies that offer the

greatest carbon savings, rather than those which would continue to involve the burning of fossil fuels for heating. The Government will keep its position on alternative heating technologies under review and make further assessments as supporting evidence develops.

■ Boiler Upgrade Scheme: Rural Areas

Liz Saville Roberts:

[19746]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, how many low-income households have (a) applied and (b) received vouchers for measures under the Boiler Upgrade Scheme from qualifying rural postcodes.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) offers grants to help property owners transition away from fossil fuels to low carbon heating. However, other schemes such as the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund, Warm Homes: Local Grant and Energy Company Obligation are more targeted towards low-income households.

The Government and Ofgem do not collect income statistics as part of directly administering the BUS, however, socio-economic factors are studied as part of the scheme evaluation, with an interim report due to be published next year.

■ Boilers and Heat Pumps

Jim Shannon:

[18546]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what information his Department holds on the number of (a) gas boilers, (b) oil boilers, (c) heat pumps and (d) biofuel boilers there were in 2023; and if he will make an estimate of the number of each there will be in 2030.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The department only collects data on installations under Government Energy Efficiency schemes and does not hold data on privately installed heating systems.

The latest heat pump deployment figures can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/heat-pump-deployment-statistics-september-2024.

Measures installed under the ECO scheme, the Home Upgrade Grant and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/household-energy-efficiency-statistics-headline-release-november-2024.

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/green-homes-grant-local-authority-delivery-lad-and-home-upgrade-grant-hug-release-november-2024/summary-of-the-green-homes-grant-local-authority-delivery-lad-and-home-upgrade-grant-hug-statistics-november-2024.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/social-housing-decarbonisation-fund-statistics-september-2024/summary-of-the-social-housing-decarbonisation-fund-statistics-september-2024>.

Gas boilers will continue to play a role for at least the next decade as we transition to low carbon heating technologies, where departmental analysis shows that heat pumps and heat networks will have a major role to play.

Where heat pumps may not be feasible in some off-grid properties we have commissioned a package of research to collect data on the costs of different approaches to decarbonising the most complex housing archetypes, including the use of alternative low carbon heating solutions with results expected in 2025.

■ Carbon Capture and Storage

Andrew Cooper:

[\[901856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to support the development of carbon capture and storage technology.

Sarah Jones:

Carbon Capture has a fundamental role to play in our clean energy future. That's why we've committed £21.7bn to kickstart the industry. And last week, we saw an historic deal signed to get the UK's first project, the East Coast Cluster, off the ground.

That project will create thousands of jobs across the northeast, ensuring our industrial communities, particularly in Teesside, benefit from new opportunities in the industries of the future.

■ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Public Appointments

Nick Timothy:

[\[18701\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made any declarations of interest to the Permanent Secretary of his Department relating to the direct appointments he has made.

Michael Shanks:

There is an established process in place for the declaration and management of interests held by ministers. This ensures that steps are taken to avoid or mitigate any actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

[A statement covering relevant Ministers' interests](#) is published on a quarterly basis following advice from the Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards and the Department's Permanent Secretary. The most recent list of interests was published in November 2024.

■ Electric Cables: Storms

Ann Davies:

[\[19917\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what cost comparison he has made of repairing (a) overhead and (b) underground power lines following storm damage.

Michael Shanks:

The benefits and costs of investing in under grounding power lines were considered following Storm Arwen in 2021. As noted in the Storm Arwen Review Final Report, investing in undergrounding would not be a cost-effective on long spur routes that serve smaller numbers of customers.

It is not possible to make the network be fully resistant to severe weather. Undergrounding comes at a cost of up to 20 times that of overhead lines, before secondary costs and disruption are factored in. Whilst underground cables are prone to fewer faults, they incur longer repair times when a fault does occur.

■ **Energy: Housing****Monica Harding:**[\[901854\]](#)

What steps he is taking to improve the energy efficiency of homes in winter 2024-25.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

We have announced a target to deliver 300,000 home upgrades this year, as we know that too many families are living in poor quality housing and paying over the odds to heat their homes.

The Warm Homes Plan will be critical to ending the scourge of energy inefficiency and ensuring that families have energy security.

■ **Energy: Meters****David Smith:**[\[18788\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that people have functioning smart meters in (a) North Northumberland constituency and (b) other rural areas.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Department is working closely with industry to make sure they are addressing meters across GB that are not providing automatic readings. Statistics on meters not providing automatic readings are published at a GB wide level only (at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/smart-meters-statistics>).

Energy suppliers are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure their customers' smart meters are fully functional. Ofgem regulates suppliers against these obligations.

The Government recognises that too many households across GB have smart meters which currently cannot send automatic readings to their energy suppliers. We will set out new plans to improve the rollout and the consumer experience, alongside Ofgem, in due course.

■ Energy: Prices

Irene Campbell:

[\[901848\]](#)

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

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

I was pleased to announce alongside energy suppliers a package of support that will ensure the most vulnerable are protected this winter.

This £500m industry package, containing debt relief alongside other measures, and taken with the Warm Home Discount, brings total support to £1bn for this winter will mean the most vulnerable are protected from rising bills.

■ Environment Protection: Employment

Jim Shannon:

[\[18543\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate the Government has made of the number of green jobs created by the (a) production and (b) uptake of renewable liquid gases.

Sarah Jones:

Established within DESNZ, The Office for Clean Energy Jobs will focus on developing a skilled workforce in core energy and net zero sectors, critical to meeting our mission to make the UK a clean energy superpower. Our Mission to make the UK a Clean Energy Superpower will create hundreds of thousands of jobs and opportunities across the UK.

■ Fuel Oil

Liz Saville Roberts:

[\[19744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what plans his Department has to bring forward a consultation on a Renewable Heating Fuel Obligation as required by section 159 of the Energy Act 2023.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

As sustainable biomass is a limited resource, the Government expects to prioritise its use in sectors like aviation which have fewest options to decarbonise. Renewable liquid heating fuels (RLHF) are also much more expensive to use than other heating solutions.

Before taking decisions on whether to support the use of RLHFs, like hydrotreated vegetable oil, in heating, the Government would require stronger evidence on their affordability for consumers, and the availability of sustainable feedstocks.

Fuel Poverty: Death**Angus MacDonald:**[\[18867\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an estimate of the potential impact of levels of fuel poverty on levels of excess deaths in each of the last two years.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) does not collect data on the potential impact of levels of fuel poverty on levels of excess deaths.

The Government is committed to a preventative approach to public health. Keeping people warm and well at home and improving the quality of new and existing homes will play an essential part in enabling people to live longer, healthier lives and reducing pressures on the NHS.

DESNZ has multiple targeted schemes delivering energy efficiency measures to low-income and fuel poor households and provides bill support to eligible low-income households through the Warm Home Discount.

Fuel Poverty: Rural Areas**Liz Saville Roberts:**[\[19747\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will take steps to help tackle rural fuel poverty under the Warm Homes Plan.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Warm Homes Plan will help people find ways to save money on energy bills and transform our ageing building stock into comfortable, low-carbon homes that are fit for the future. The transition to warmer, decarbonised homes, will include support for the most vulnerable to help tackle fuel poverty. We will set out further details on the Warm Homes Plan in due course.

We are currently supporting rural homes and homes off the gas grid through targeted energy efficiency schemes including the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and Home Upgrade Grant, which are aimed at low income and vulnerable consumers.

Heat Batteries: Housing**Tom Hayes:**[\[901847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether he has made an assessment of the potential role of heat batteries in decarbonising domestic heating.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

Through our Warm Homes Plan we are focused on rolling out home upgrades across the country, with a focus on heat pump installation and fabric solutions.

In many cases heat batteries are less efficient than heat pumps, however they do not require outside space, and can often be cheaper to install in some circumstances.

We are currently exploring the role heat batteries could play in the future.

■ Heat Pumps

Nick Timothy:

[18696]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what estimate he has made of the financial impact of the Clean Heat Market Mechanism on the average household income.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The Clean Heat Market Mechanism is not expected to have an impact on average household income. Estimated costs and benefits associated with the scheme can be found in the [impact assessment](#) which was published alongside the laying of a Draft Statutory Instrument for the scheme.

■ Heat Pumps: Carbon Dioxide

Nick Timothy:

[18697]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will make an estimate of the reduction in emissions in tCO₂ due to the introduction of the Clean Heat Market Mechanism in each year from 2025 to 2030.

Miatta Fahnbulleh:

The [impact assessment](#) published alongside the laying of the Draft Statutory Instrument for the Clean Heat Market Mechanism estimates the net greenhouse gas emissions savings at the initial target level at 0.03MtCO₂e annually in the years 2025 through to 2028 and 0.04MtCO₂e in both 2029 and 2030. The majority of emissions savings relating to heat pump deployment over this period are attributed to other policies, such as the Boiler Upgrade Scheme.

■ Net Zero Teesside Power and Northern Endurance Partnership: Compensation

Adrian Ramsay:

[19195]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether, under amendments to the Government's business models for the (a) Net Zero Teesside Power (NZT) and (b) Northern Endurance Partnership (NEP) projects, money has been (i) ringfenced for and (ii) committed to compensation for losses that might be incurred by (A) the National Wealth Fund, (B) lending banks, (C) BP, (D) Equinor, (E) TotalEnergies and (F) other investors or equity holders arising from the Judicial Review challenging the lawfulness of the decision by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero to grant approval for the joint Development Consent Order underpinning NZT and NEP.

Michael Shanks:

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero has not ringfenced or committed any funds for compensation related to the entities or matters outlined in the question.

Net Zero Teesside's Development Consent Order (DCO), determined in February 2024, remains in force. Considering the ongoing legal proceedings, it would not be appropriate to comment further at this time.

■ Nuclear Power Stations

Andrew Bowie: [\[18593\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, whether his Department is taking steps to extend the operation of existing nuclear power plants beyond 2030.

Michael Shanks:

EDF have recently announced extensions to the Advance Gas-cooled Reactor nuclear power stations. Heysham 1 and Hartlepool are now expected to operate until March 2027 and Heysham 2 and Torness are now expected to operate until March 2030. Sizewell B is currently scheduled to operate until 2035.

The Government is not involved in the decision-making process to extend the operating lifetime of nuclear power stations. The recent decisions to extend the Advance Gas-cooled Reactor fleet have been taken by EDF based on safety and commercial assessments.

As set out in our Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, nuclear will continue to play a key role in the energy system out to 2030 and beyond with the operation of Sizewell B and delivery of Hinkley Point C.

■ Offshore Industry

Brian Leishman: [\[19144\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps his Department is taking to ensure a just transition for oil and gas (a) communities and (b) workers.

Michael Shanks:

We intend to manage the North Sea in a way that ensures a fair, orderly and prosperous transition, with no community left behind. We have already launched Great British Energy, begun the biggest ever investment in offshore wind, and are moving ahead with new North Sea industries like carbon capture and storage and hydrogen. The UK has a highly skilled oil and gas workforce, with high transferability of skills to these new roles. We have also created the Office for Clean Energy Jobs to ensure that clean energy jobs are abundant, high-quality, fairly paid, and have good working conditions.

■ Quadrature Climate Foundation

Nick Timothy: [\[18698\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions (a) Ministers, (b) special advisers, and (c) officials in his Department have had with the Quadrature Climate Foundation since 5 July 2024.

Nick Timothy:

[\[18699\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions (a) Ministers, (b) special advisers, and (c) officials in his Department have had with Quadrature Capital since 5 July 2024.

Nick Timothy:

[\[18700\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what discussions (a) Ministers, (b) special advisers, and (c) officials in his Department have had with Ecotricity since 5 July 2024.

Michael Shanks:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 October 2024 to Question UIN [6511](#).

■ Remote Sensing: Environment

George Freeman:

[R] [\[18534\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, if he will have discussions with the (a) UK Space Agency and (b) Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on using UK Earth Observation data for greenhouse gas emissions tracking.

Kerry McCarthy:

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero engages with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology and the UK Space Agency through the National Space Council, where Government's direction for space policy and strategy is decided. These departments also engage at Official level through the National Space Board.

The UK is one of only four countries in the world that uses an independent system of Earth Observation measurements to supplement its greenhouse gas inventory and the first to do so.

■ Renewable Energy: Job Creation

Claire Young:

[\[901850\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to support job creation in the renewable energy sector.

Michael Shanks:

Our recently announced Clean Industry Bonus will help to drive investment in our heartland and coastal communities, and in cleaner supply chains – creating economic opportunities in the supply chains of the future. We have also set up the Office for Clean Energy Jobs, which will work closely with businesses and unions to map skills needs and ensure we have the workforce needed to take advantage of the clean energy transition.

■ Renewable Energy: Seas and Oceans

Alex Easton: [19180]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps he is taking to ensure that the deployment of offshore renewables does not impact on blue carbon stores.

Michael Shanks:

The UK Government is committed to reaching clean power by 2030 and restoring nature. We need to ensure that our marine ecosystems are healthy, and capturing and storing carbon too. This means that new energy infrastructure needs to be planned and developed in a way that protects the natural environment and supports nature recovery.

Assessment and mitigation of environmental impacts are a core part of our planning processes, and future spatial plans will support rebuilding our natural infrastructure at the same time as building the new energy infrastructure we need for the twenty first century.

■ Renewable Energy: Supply Chains

Andrew Bowie: [18595]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what progress he has made on the Green Industries Growth Accelerator programme.

Andrew Bowie: [18596]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what his planned timetable is for announcing Green Industries Growth Accelerator grants.

Sarah Jones:

The Government recognises the need for strong, home-grown clean energy supply chains to support sustainable jobs and secure growth as we decarbonise our economy.

As part of the of next year's Industrial Strategy, the Government is developing plans, aligned with the multi-year Spending Review, for each of the key growth sectors, which include Clean Energy technologies.

These sector plans will set out how Government and industry intend to achieve long-term growth through bespoke arrangements for each sector.

■ Sizewell C Power Station

Andrew Bowie: [18591]

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

Michael Shanks:

The policy position outlined in the National Energy System Operator ("NESO") open letter [<https://www.neso.energy/document/349496/download>] (published 10th

December 2024) indicates that, given Sizewell C received planning consent in July 2022, the existing arrangements for Sizewell C grid connection should be eligible to be grandfathered, subject to NESO's proposals for reforming the connections process being approved by Ofgem and taking effect.

National Grid Electricity Transmission has also confirmed that Sizewell C will retain the same enabling works identified in previous connection agreements (2007-2009).

■ Solar Power

Max Wilkinson:

[\[901857\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent assessment he has made of the potential contribution of domestic solar energy generation to the UK meeting its net zero targets.

Michael Shanks:

Domestic solar will play an essential role. Through the Solar Taskforce and the forthcoming Solar Roadmap, we will set out recommendations on how Government and industry can work together to significantly increase rooftop solar capacity.

■ Solar Power: Land Use

Charlie Dewhirst:

[\[901855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the development of large-scale solar farms.

Michael Shanks:

As outlined in the clean power action plan last week, solar power will be vital to meeting our mission and bringing down energy bills for good. Solar is one of the cheapest and most-readily available sources of energy we have, and whilst rooftop and other installations will play a role, we are clear that to protect families in the future, large scale solar will need to be built.

■ Solar Taskforce

Sarah Champion:

[\[18547\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December 2024 to Question 16151 on Energy: Supply Chains, whether his Department is taking steps to include (a) trade unions and (b) civil society in the solar taskforce.

Michael Shanks:

The Solar Taskforce is working towards the publication of the Solar Roadmap in Spring 2025. This will outline the actions required to develop supply chains that are resilient, sustainable, innovative, and free from forced labour.

Solar Energy UK, the solar industry trade association that co-chairs the Taskforce, is leading the industry response on this matter by developing and launching the Solar Stewardship Initiative, in partnership with Solar Power Europe.

As part of this work, members of the Taskforce are engaging with relevant civil society groups and trade unions.

■ Wind Power: Fylde

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[19898]

To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, with reference to his oral Answer to the Question from the hon. Member for Fylde of 8 October 2024, Official Report, column 140, whether his Department has made an assessment of the viability of (a) Stanah in Blackpool North and Fleetwood constituency and (b) other alternative routes for connecting the Morgan and Morecambe windfarm to the national grid.

Michael Shanks:

The Electricity System Operator (then ESO, now NESO) assessed connection to the Stanah substation for Irish Sea windfarms alongside other substations in the Northwest and North Wales as part of the Holistic Network Design.[1]

ESO identified that Stanah substation would require extension to accommodate the Morgan and Morecambe offshore windfarms. Due to limited space, a new substation would be needed, with associated time and cost. Access was challenging due to residential and recreational surroundings, and there were environmental constraints around Morecambe Bay.

In contrast, Penwortham had a more accessible footprint, fewer constraints, and better electrical connectivity to the wider network.

[1] <https://www.neso.energy/publications/beyond-2030/holistic-network-design-offshore-wind>

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

■ Agriculture: Food Supply

Sir Geoffrey Cox:

[18096]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 29 July 2024 to Question 1488 on Agriculture: Food Supply, if he will have discussions with the Prime Minister on holding a farm to fork summit at 10 Downing Street in 2025.

Daniel Zeichner:

Defra will work side-by-side with industry and stakeholders across the food system to deliver lasting change and will consider options for specific events as appropriate.

■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax

Helen Whately:

[17854]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made an estimate of the number of farmers who will exit the sector as a result of the change to agricultural property relief in the Autumn Budget.

Daniel Zeichner:

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

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

Data from HMRC and supported by the independent Office for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) indicates that around 500 estates a year will be impacted. The majority of those will be able to adapt their businesses. The exact number will depend on a wider range of factors based on their individual circumstances.

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

■ Agriculture: Kent**Helen Whately:**[\[17855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate he has made of the economic contribution of farming to (a) Kent and (b) Faversham and Mid Kent constituency.

Daniel Zeichner:

In 2023, total income from farming for Kent was £187.76 million.

Total income from farming for each of the five Kent ITL3 regions was £5.16 million for Medway; £52.72 million for Kent Thames Gateway; £35.15 million for East Kent; £54.52 million for Mid Kent; and £40.21 million for West Kent.

Regional estimates of total income from farming are produced at international territorial levels (ITL) 1, 2 and 3, with ITL3 being the most granular geographical breakdown. As such, the specific breakdown requested for part b) of the question is not available.

■ **Agriculture: South Devon**

Caroline Voaden: [\[19796\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many applicants in South Devon constituency received capital grant funding in (a) 2022-23, (b) 2023-24 and (c) 2024-25.

Daniel Zeichner:
During the Financial Years (a) 2022-23, (b) 2023-24 and (c) 2024-25 a total of 115 Number of Farm Businesses have received Capital Grant Funding in South Devon constituency.

These are broken down by financial year below.

Capital Grants- How many applicants received funding by Volume:

SCHEME	22/23	23/24	24/25
CS Capital Grants	6	29	80

■ **Agriculture: Subsidies**

Martin Wrigley: [\[20072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has conducted an impact assessment of the decision to accelerate reduction of direct payments to farming businesses.

Daniel Zeichner:
The Government has committed to support farmers through a farming budget of £5 billion over two years, including £2.4 billion in 2025/26. Accelerating the phase out of Direct Payments will allow us to focus more of this funding on Environmental Land Management schemes, which will boost nature and sustainable food production.

We publish regular statistics on farm income in England, including data earlier this year looking at how farm business income has changed since the start of the agricultural transition (Monitoring the agricultural transition period in England, 2022/23 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)). This release will be updated in February 2025 with the 2024/24 data. On 14 November 2024, we published our Farm Business Income statistics ([Farm business income - GOV.UK](#)), which looked at how farm business income has changed in 2023/24, including the contribution of Direct Payments and agri-environment payments to farm incomes, including analysis by farm type.

Data relating to farm businesses are regularly published. Agriculture in the UK 2023 was published in June 2024. Farming evidence packs have been recently updated including key statistics and farm performance ([Farming statistics evidence packs -](#)

[GOV.UK](https://gov.uk)). These set out an extensive range of data to provide an overview of agriculture in the UK, and the contribution of farm payments to farm incomes, including analysis by sector, location in England and type of land tenure.

We will continue to carry out appropriate and timely assessments of our interventions to inform policy development.

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

Stuart Andrew:

[\[17788\]](#)

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

Daniel Zeichner:

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

■ **Avian Influenza**

Jim Shannon:

[\[19297\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of avian flu across the UK in the last 12 months.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) lead Government action on animal disease control in Great Britain and Northern Ireland respectively. This includes carrying out routine surveillance of disease risks in the UK and globally. As part of this work, assessments of risk from highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) to both wild birds and poultry and how those risks are changing seasonally are made and published on gov.uk and daera-ni.gov.uk.

To support these assessments, the International and National Reference Laboratory for avian influenza at APHA Weybridge work closely with international colleagues to monitor for any changes in the strains circulating or changes in viral sequences indicative of adaptation. In the last 12 months, two strains of HPAI (H5N5 and H5N1) have been confirmed in commercial poultry in the UK. This was not unexpected and follows recent detections of both strains in continental Europe and detections in wild birds in Great Britain through the [wild bird surveillance scheme](#). However, the number of findings of HPAI in wild birds and the number of cases confirmed in kept birds remain far lower than in previous years.

■ Cats: Animal Breeding**Jess Brown-Fuller:**[\[19207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to regulate cat breeding.

Daniel Zeichner:

Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018, anyone in the business of breeding and selling cats as pets needs to have a valid licence issued by their local authority. Licensees must meet strict statutory minimum welfare standards which are enforced by local authorities who have powers to issue, refuse, vary or revoke licences.

Defra has been working on a post-implementation review of the Regulations which considers whether the objectives further improve the protections they provide. We are also carefully considering recommendations in the EFRA select committee's report into pet welfare and abuse and the Animal Welfare Committee's Opinion on feline breeding, which will be published shortly.

■ Cats: Animal Welfare**Ruth Jones:**[\[19768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 in regulating the welfare of cats in England.

Daniel Zeichner:

Under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018, anyone in the business of breeding and selling cats as pets, boarding cats or using cats for exhibition purposes needs to have a valid licence issued by their local authority. Licensees must meet strict statutory minimum welfare standards which are enforced by local authorities who have powers to issue, refuse, vary or revoke licences.

Defra has been working on a post-implementation review (PIR) of the Regulations. This review considers whether the Regulations have met their objectives, and where there could be scope to further improve the protections they provide. The PIR will be published shortly.

■ Disposable Wipes: Plastics**Steve Darling:**[\[19106\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will introduce legislative proposals to ban wet wipes containing plastic.

Emma Hardy:

The Government is working together with the devolved Governments to understand the issue, with a view to legislate to ban wet wipes containing plastic across the UK.

■ Eggs: Imports

Julia Buckley:

[19525]

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

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government shares the public's high regard for the UK's environmental protections, food standards and animal welfare.

The Government recognises farmers' concerns about imports produced using methods not permitted in the UK. We have been clear that we will use our Trade Strategy to promote the highest food production standards.

■ Electronic Equipment: Waste

Ruth Jones:

[19385]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the amount of electronic waste generated by the UK by (a) product type and (b) region in each year since 2013.

Mary Creagh:

Currently we do not collect data on the amount of electronic waste generated by product type or by region. The Environment Agency publish data on waste electricals and electronic equipment (WEEE) collected by registered Producer Compliance Schemes (PCS) and treated by Approved Authorised Treatment Facilities (AATF)

Independent research [on mapping waste electrical flows in the UK](#) carried out by Material Focus estimates waste electrical and electronic equipment arising across all potential collection routes across the UK.

■ EU External Trade: South America

Robin Swann:

[18833]

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of the trade agreement between the EU and Mercusor on (a) food producers and (b) farmers in Northern Ireland.

Daniel Zeichner:

The department has not made an assessment of the trade agreement between the EU and Mercusor. The department continuously monitors agri-food markets through the UK Agriculture Market Monitoring Group.

■ Farms: Biodiversity

Joe Morris: [\[19915\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to increase the resilience of farm businesses by improving biodiversity.

Joe Morris: [\[19920\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to increase the financial resilience of farms in the wake of increasing extreme weather.

Daniel Zeichner:

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

Defra's farming budget will be £2.4 billion in 2025/26. This will include the largest ever budget directed at sustainable food production and nature's recovery in our country's history: £1.8bn for environmental land management schemes. This funding will deliver improvements to food security, biodiversity, carbon emissions, water quality, air quality and flood resilience.

Additionally, across England, we will invest £2.4 billion over the next two years to improve flood resilience, by maintaining, repairing and building flood defences. We are prioritising investment in repairing and restoring critical assets, including investing an additional £36 million into maintaining key strategic assets in 2024-25 and £72 million in 2025-26.

All this funding enables us to keep momentum on the path to a more resilient and sustainable farming sector. We will work with the sector to continue to roll out, improve and evolve these schemes, to make them work for farming and nature.

■ Floods: Repairs and Maintenance

Matt Bishop: [\[17716\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to collaborate with local authorities to ensure that infrastructure is swiftly repaired after the recent floods.

Emma Hardy:

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

To ensure we protect the country from the devastating impacts of flooding, we will invest £2.4 billion in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to improve flood resilience, by building, maintaining, and repairing flood defences.

■ Food: Imports

Harriet Cross:

[\[19192\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the UK's (a) biosecurity and (b) border control measures for imported goods.

Daniel Zeichner:

The Government is committed to protecting our biosecurity and we are using a risk based approach to maintain the appropriate level of controls.

Defra will continue to monitor for new and emerging risks and review the border control checks introduced under the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM).

■ Government Departments: Energy

Rupert Lowe:

[\[17670\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 3 December to question 16316 on Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Energy if he will publish data on each Department's energy use, broken down by energy source.

Mary Creagh:

Defra publishes data on Government departments' overall and direct emissions within the Greening Government Commitments framework.

■ Horticulture: Import Controls

Sir John Hayes:

[\[18884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps he is taking to reduce time taken for (a) sanitary and (b) phytosanitary checks at border control posts for horticultural produce.

Daniel Zeichner:

GB plant health services have increased the number of plant health inspection staff to service the demand for import checks in England and Wales of EU plants and plant products.

Inspector levels are being monitored to ensure these meet demand and deliver checks in line with set Service Level Agreements (SLA) and ensure minimal trade disruption.

BCPs are designed to handle high volumes of imported SPS goods with inspectors working shifts to carry out reliable checks which minimise friction on traffic flow. Checks at BCPs are handled by trained staff ensuring inspections are undertaken safely and efficiently.

■ Inland Border Facilities: Ashford**Charlie Dewhirst:** [\[19524\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the overall (a) capital and (b) running costs are of the Inland Border Facility at Sevington; and what the budget is for that facility.

Daniel Zeichner:

This is commercially sensitive information and therefore may not be released. We are planning to publish some information regarding operating costs in the near future. The information will be published on GOV.UK.

■ Litter: Fines**Kevin Hollinrake:** [\[17833\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans the Government has to issue guidance on issuing of litter fines to householders.

Mary Creagh:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 25 November 2024 to the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, Question [14343](#).

■ Members: Correspondence**Clive Jones:** [\[19161\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Wokingham to the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on funding for surplus food redistribution, dated 30 October 2024.

Mary Creagh:

A reply to the hon. Member has been prepared and will be issued very shortly.

■ Mobile Phones: Secondhand Goods**Ruth Jones:** [\[19386\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the findings in the report by Which? entitled How to make big savings on a second-hand phone, published in October 2023.

Mary Creagh:

We have not made an assessment of the report by Which entitled 'How to make big savings on a second-hand phone', published in October 2023. In our manifesto, the government committed to reducing waste by moving to a circular economy. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has set this as one of Defra's top five priorities.

■ Packaging: Recycling

Lee Anderson:

[\[17886\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the evidential basis is for the levels of Extended Producer Responsibility fee for (a) steel food cans, (b) fibre-based cartons and (c) plastic pouches.

Mary Creagh:

Defra published the second iteration of packaging extended producer responsibility (pEPR) illustrative base fees on 30 of September. These illustrative fees are estimates only, based on the best available data at the time. They are not the final base fees to be used for year 1 of the pEPR scheme. The second iteration of illustrative base fees are based on tonnages of packaging placed on the market in 2023, as reported by producers on RPD, and local authority waste management costs, which were modelled using the LAPCAP model. Local authority costs account for the management of different material types based on key drivers, such as a local authority recycling system, residual collection frequency, or level of deprivation and rurality. Defra's model is undergoing a robust quality assurance process under the new Government, with ongoing consultation taking place which involves local authorities and packaging producers, to ensure that fees reflect the costs of waste management associated with each material.

■ Sewage: Coastal Areas

Edward Morello:

[\[19201\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of water bill increases on coastal communities that are affected by sewage dumping.

Edward Morello:

[\[19202\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure that people who live in coastal areas that experience high levels of sewage dumping do not face higher water bills as a result.

Emma Hardy:

For too long, investment has not kept pace with the challenges of an ageing infrastructure system, a rapidly growing population, and climate change. Bills will therefore now need to rise to invest in our crumbling infrastructure and deliver cleaner waterways.

As the independent economic regulator, it is Ofwat's responsibility to independently scrutinise water company business plans and ensure the prices water companies charge their customers are fair and proportionate. Ofwat will therefore publish their final determinations for Price Review 2024 on 19 December, which will set company expenditure and customer bills for 2025-2030.

During its first week of office, the Government announced funding for vital infrastructure investment is ringfenced and can only be spent on upgrades benefiting

customers and the environment. Ofwat will therefore ensure when money for investment is not spent, companies refund customers, with money never allowed to be diverted for bonuses, dividends or salary increases.

■ Shoreline Management Plans

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter: [\[17989\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he plans to review the current Shoreline Management Plans.

Emma Hardy:

Protecting all communities around the country from flooding is one of the Secretary of State's five core priorities.

This Government set up the first ever Floods Resilience Taskforce, on 12th September. The Taskforce marks a new approach to preparing for flooding, and working between national, regional and local government.

As announced at the Autumn Budget 2024, the Government will invest £2.4 billion over two years to improve flood resilience and better protect communities across the country, including from coastal erosion.

Shoreline Management Plans are developed and owned by the local councils and coastal protection authorities. These provide long-term strategic plans which identify approaches for managing the flood and coastal erosion risks at every stretch of coastline.

Shoreline Management Plans have recently been refreshed with updated action plans. This follows several years of collaborative work between the Environment Agency and coastal groups.

■ Sustainable Farming Incentive

Rachel Gilmour: [\[17409\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether the record-keeping requirement for the Sustainable Farming Initiative for 2024 will be maintained.

Daniel Zeichner:

For Sustainable Farming Incentive, the Rural Payments Agency carries out desk-based administrative checks on a sample basis which can include requesting and checking the nature and quality of any supporting evidence, such as receipts and farm records. There are no plans to remove this requirement.

■ Trees: Conservation

Blake Stephenson: [\[19113\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department plans to take to enhance the protection of (a) ancient and (b) veteran trees.

Mary Creagh:

The Ancient Woodland Inventory, updated Planning Practice Guidance and the Standing Advice on ancient woodlands and ancient and veteran trees are in place to support local decision makers make informed decisions about planning applications near these habitats. Protections have been further strengthened by the Town and Country Planning Consultation Direction 2024 which includes suitable criteria and arrangements that must be followed for consulting Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary of State once a local planning authority has resolved to grant planning permission for development affecting ancient woodland.

The National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that planning decisions should not result in the deterioration or loss of ancient woodland or ancient or veteran trees. We will continue to work to ensure our ancient woodlands and trees remain protected.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**■ Afghanistan: Women****Tonia Antoniazzi:**[\[17861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Afghan counterpart on the treatment of women and girls in that country.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We have repeatedly condemned Taliban restrictions on women and girls' rights, both bilaterally and internationally. As the Foreign Secretary has said, exclusion of women from all aspects of public life is a tragic setback for Afghanistan.

Officials from the Doha-based UK Mission to Afghanistan continue to press Taliban acting ministers and Afghan officials on human rights abuses in Afghanistan. Officials visit Kabul regularly, raising issues directly with senior members of the Taliban, including the unacceptable violations of the rights of women and girls. Since 4 December officials have been raising the issue of the Taliban ban on women accessing medical education and training in Afghanistan.

Alice Macdonald:[\[17942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when his Department last raised the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan in the (a) UN Human Rights Council and (b) General Assembly.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The government continues to call for the human rights of all Afghans to be protected. We condemned the Taliban's actions against women and girls in a statement at the UN Third Committee on 8 October and in a statement on Afghanistan at the 57th UN Human Rights Council on 9 October. The future of Afghanistan as a country at peace

with itself, its neighbours and the international community, relies on there being human rights for all.

■ Aleppo: Violence

Sammy Wilson:

[\[18516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to respond to (a) attacks on (i) Christian communities, (ii) humanitarian access and (iii) religious freedom and (b) violence in Aleppo.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The FCDO has consistently underlined the importance of protecting all civilians, including minorities, publicly and in our engagement with regional and international partners. We are closely monitoring the treatment of religious minorities, including Christians.

No one should live in fear because of what they do or do not believe in. We will continue to advocate for the right of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Syria and for an inclusive political transition.

We are working closely with the UN and other humanitarian partners to understand any barriers to access. We continue to call on all parties to support humanitarian access, including for humanitarian workers, in all regions of Syria.

In Aleppo, we are urging all parties to refrain from activity that will lead to further loss of civilian life, or damage to civilian infrastructure, to avoid further destabilisation and civilian suffering in the region.

■ Bangladesh: Assets

Lloyd Hatton:

[\[19555\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has provided the interim government in Bangladesh with support for the asset recovery of funds potentially misappropriated by the previous government.

Catherine West:

The UK is committed to assisting investigative, prosecuting and judicial authorities in combating international crime. We have robust illicit finance legislation and instruments which can be used to support asset recovery requests. Requests require significant domestic political support, as well as cooperation from law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. We are in discussions with the International Anti-Corruption Coordination Centre hosted by the UK's National Crime Agency and the International Centre for Asset Recovery on how to support the Interim Government of Bangladesh. In October, the UK National Crime Agency visited Dhaka as part of the UK's effort to support Bangladesh in this area, as well as wider engagement on law enforcement issues. We will continue to support these recoveries to the extent that we can.

■ Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement

Vikki Slade:

[\[19806\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to ratify the Global Oceans Treaty.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Government is completely committed to ratification of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement, also known as the Global Oceans Treaty or the High Seas Treaty), which is in line with our determination to reinvigorate the UK's wider international leadership on climate and nature. Work is in hand on the measures needed to implement the detailed and complex provisions of the Agreement before the UK can ratify.

■ British Council: Finance

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:

[\[17208\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 28 November 2024 to Question 14865 on British Council: Finance, what the planned expenditure of the British Council is for 2024/25.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The British Council's Corporate Plan for 2024/25 sets out its projected expenditure as £1,069.5 million and projected total income as £1,047.5 million.

Phil Brickell:

[\[17658\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to ensure the financial stability of the British Council.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

This Government is committed to a successful British Council that is financially stable. Our funding to the British Council underlines our support. The 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 Council: Repayments

Helen Grant:

[\[17786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of British Council's repayment of its pandemic loan on its ability to promote UK soft power.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Government is committed to a successful British Council that is financially stable. The Government recognises the value of the British Council as a UK soft power asset through its important work in promoting the English language, UK arts and culture

and education. The Government remains committed to recovering the loan as soon as the British Council's finances allow. We are working closely with the British Council and HM Treasury on this issue. 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 Nationals Abroad: Death**

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[17207\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what his Department's procedures are for informing relatives when a British national dies abroad in (a) non-suspicious and (b) suspicious circumstances.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

When the FCDO Consular Directorate is first notified of the death of a British national abroad, consular staff will, wherever possible, arrange for the relevant police force to notify UK-based relatives as soon as possible.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: [\[17586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the APPG report entitled Deaths Abroad, Consular Services and Assistance Report 2019: Why families in the UK deserve better and what can be done, whether his Department has taken steps to implement the recommendations of that report.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) engaged with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Deaths Abroad, Consular Services and Assistance following the publication of its report on 2 November 2019. The report's recommendations were taken into consideration in the development of the 2022 Consular Strategy. FCDO consular staff are available to offer appropriate and tailored support to British nationals and their families, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. The support we can provide is set out on GOV.UK in Support for British nationals abroad. The FCDO seeks continuously to improve our processes and services by acting on feedback and reviewing what we do.

James McMurdock: [\[18854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what support his Department provides to British citizens and their families in cases where (a) suspicious deaths occur abroad and (b) local investigations are perceived to be inadequate.

James McMurdock: [\[18856\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department plans to review the consular support available to families of British citizens who die abroad under suspicious circumstances.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

FCDO consular staff offer tailored support to families bereaved through the death of British nationals overseas, including in cases where the authority overseas is

investigating a death as suspicious or where the family have concerns about the investigation process overseas. This support can include advising families on how to raise concerns about the local investigation; signpost families on how to seek independent legal advice; and, where appropriate, refer families to relevant partner organisations for further support. FCDO staff can also register interest in the death with local authorities and request information and/or convey any concerns the family may have. The FCDO welcomes feedback on its service and is committed to continuous improvement.

■ **British Nationals Abroad: Prisoners**

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18748\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the number of UK citizens that are imprisoned abroad.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) provides consular assistance to c.4100 British nationals who are arrested or detained each year, and is currently providing ongoing assistance to c.1,400 British nationals detained overseas. It is not mandatory for British nationals to report incidents to the FCDO or one of its diplomatic missions. Data held by the FCDO only includes incidents where we have offered consular assistance.

■ **Chinmoy Krishna Das**

Shivani Raja:

[\[19107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Bangladeshi counterpart on the recent arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das.

Catherine West:

The UK is committed to promoting and protecting human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). We monitor human rights in Bangladesh closely, including following student-led protests in Bangladesh. I understand the concerns about the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das. In November, during my visit to Bangladesh, I discussed the importance of protecting religious minorities, including the Hindu community with Chief Adviser Yunus. I underlined the UK Government's commitment to religious freedom in Bangladesh. We will continue to engage with the Interim Government of Bangladesh on the importance of FoRB.

■ **Development Aid: Reviews**

Wendy Morton:

[\[19696\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with Baroness Shafik on consulting with (a) parliamentarians, (b) NGOs and (c) other stakeholders, in the context of her strategic review of international development.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Foreign Secretary is grateful to Baroness Shafik for her leadership on the review and pleased that she and her team have been able to engage with parliamentarians, including the International Development Committee, NGOs and other stakeholders during the process of her review. This has built upon the extensive consultation on the UK's approach to international development carried out in 2023, across government, with development sector experts, members of Parliament and civil society groups in the UK and the Global South.

The Foreign Secretary will consider the recommendations of the three reviews and will engage further externally with Baroness Shafik in the new year, as will the Minister for International Development.

■ **Diego Garcia****James Cartlidge:**[\[18155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to oral answer of 13 November 2024 by the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, on Chagos Islands, Official Report, Column 793, what the evidential basis is for the statement that providing the costs of the Chagos settlement would put the future secure operation of the Diego Garcia base at risk.

Stephen Doughty:

The Government fully respects the calls for transparency. However, confirming these costs could affect the UK's ability - and that of our closest allies - to negotiate basing agreements in the future therefore putting secure operations at risk. We are not willing to jeopardise the UK's national security.

Further details of the Treaty will be put before both Houses for scrutiny and treaty ratification in the usual way.

■ **Diego Garcia: Military Bases****Mr Mark Francois:**[\[18900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Mauritius on (a) Mauritius' policy on nuclear weapons and (b) the future operation of the military base in Diego Garcia.

Stephen Doughty:

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary met the then Mauritian Prime Minister in London on 23 July. The political agreement between the Prime Minister and then Mauritian Prime Minister was reached on 3 October. The new Mauritian Prime Minister has since written to the Prime Minister to reaffirm his commitment to concluding the deal.

This engagement has been supplemented by official level meetings, which have covered all elements of the Agreement. This includes a meeting between the Prime Minister's Special Envoy with BIOT negotiations, Jonathan Powell and PM Ramgoolam on 25 November.

Mr Mark Francois:

[\[18901\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his US counterpart on the potential impact of transferring sovereignty over Diego Garcia on existing agreements on (a) nuclear capabilities and (b) other matters governing the operation of the UK-US base.

Stephen Doughty:

The Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with Secretary Blinken on a range of issues, including the British Indian Ocean Territory / Chagos Archipelago.

We look forward to continuing to engage with the current and incoming US Administrations in the usual way to protect and enhance our shared security interests.

■ **Diplomatic Service: British Nationals Abroad**

James McMurdock:

[\[18855\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to improve collaboration with foreign authorities in investigating deaths of British nationals overseas.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

FCDO consular staff offer tailored support to families bereaved through the death of British nationals overseas. The FCDO is not an investigative body, though can support families to engage with the relevant foreign authority investigating the death of a British national. FCDO staff can register interest in the death with local authorities, request information and signpost families on how to seek independent legal advice.

■ **Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Ahmadiyya**

Jim Shannon:

[\[17100\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether (a) he and (b) Ministers in his Department have had meetings with Ahmadiyya Muslim representatives in London in the last six months.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

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 Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan. The British High Commissioner also raised Ahmadi rights with the Punjab Minister for Minority Affairs on 21 November.

On 9 May, FCDO officials met with Ahmadi community representatives at the Baitul Futuh mosque in Morden, London, where they discussed key concerns of the Ahmadi community. Officials again met with representatives from the Ahmadi community on 29 August.

■ Foreign Relations: Elections

Wendy Morton:

[\[19695\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the UK's use of soft power to support free and fair elections worldwide.

Anneliese Dodds:

Supporting democracy and defending democratic freedoms are fundamental for the UK. Election observation is an integral part of democratic scrutiny. It contributes to transparent and accountable political processes and institutions overseas.

The UK is a firm supporter of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and its vital work deploying missions to observe elections in the OSCE region. This autumn, the UK supported the OSCE's work by funding over 135 election observers to five countries, including to highly contested elections in Georgia and Moldova.

■ Gaza: Health Professions

Ben Lake:

[\[18599\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps is he taking to tackle (a) detention and (b) mistreatment of healthcare workers in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Medical workers and facilities, including ambulances and rescue personnel, must be protected in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and allowed to provide life-saving services. It is unacceptable that northern Gaza now has no functioning hospitals, after strikes on Kamal Adwan hospital. On 5 November, when I spoke to the Israeli Ambassador, I raised the UK's grave concerns that Kamal Adwan continues to come under fire. This government has been clear that Israel must do much more to protect civilians, civilian infrastructure and humanitarian workers, and Israel must allow medical staff to carry out their work unimpeded, and to travel around Gaza as needed.

■ Gaza: Hostage Taking

Wendy Morton:

[\[17540\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the incoming US Administration on securing the release of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Whilst we have not had any official discussions with the incoming US administration regarding the release of hostages, our position remains clear. It is appalling that hostages taken by Hamas terrorists on 7 October are still being held captive, including one British national, Emily Damari, and three hostages with strong British

links. We have supported hostage talks throughout, and continue to work alongside our allies and partners in the region, exercising every possible diplomatic lever to see the hostages immediately and unconditionally released. We thank the US, Qatar, Egypt, and all international partners, for their coordinating efforts. Ensuring the release of all hostages remains a top priority for this government.

■ **Gaza: Israel**

Claire Hanna:

[\[18227\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the report by Amnesty International entitled *You feel like you are subhuman: Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza*.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are aware of the report by Amnesty International, entitled "You feel like you are subhuman: Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza". The UK is fully committed to international law. The UK Government's long-standing policy is that any formal determination as to whether genocide has occurred is a matter for a competent national or international court, such as the International Court of Justice, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. Since 2 September, the UK has suspended relevant export licences to Israel for use in military operations in the Gaza conflict, following a review which concluded there is a clear risk that UK export items might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of International Humanitarian Law. The UK remains resolute in our call for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages cruelly held by Hamas since 7 October 2023 and urgent action to address the humanitarian crisis.

■ **Golan Heights: Syria**

Jon Trickett:

[\[18888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the Government recognises the Golan Heights as Syrian territory.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Our position remains clear: The Golan Heights are occupied territory and we do not recognise Israel's annexation of them. We continue to call on Israel and all actors to uphold their obligations to peace, stability and security under international law.

■ **Israel: International Law**

Richard Burgon:

[\[18569\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, when his Department next plans to publish an assessment of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We continue to keep Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Gaza under review through regular assessments. On 2 September, the Foreign Secretary announced to Parliament the suspension of certain UK export licences to Israel, for items he concluded might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL in Gaza. This was further to the IHL assessment raising concerns about possible breaches of IHL in the areas of humanitarian access and in the treatment of detainees. The relevant export licences remain suspended and there are no plans to publish further summaries while our assessment remains unchanged.

Richard Burgon:[\[18964\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has commissioned external legal advice on Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We continue to keep Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Gaza under review through a regular assessments process, informed by legal advice. Our judgment on Israel's IHL compliance remains as set out in the Foreign Secretary's statement to Parliament on 2 September.

Richard Burgon:[\[18965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the adequacy of his Department's reporting timelines on Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law in the Middle East.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

On day one in office, the Foreign Secretary commissioned a thorough review into Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). On the first day back after the summer recess the Foreign Secretary informed parliament that the Government had taken the decision to suspend arms export licences to Israel for use in military operations in Gaza, after the review concluded that there is a clear risk that relevant exports to Israel might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of IHL. We continue to keep Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law in Gaza under review through a regular assessments process.

■ Israel: Palestinians**Matt Western:**[\[17581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Apulia G7 Leaders' communique, published in June 2024, what steps his Department is taking to support civil society peacebuilding efforts in (a) Israel and (b) Palestine.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

In June 2024, the G7 Heads of Government included milestone new language in their communiqué, committing to "working together and with other international partners to

closely coordinate and institutionalize our support for civil society peacebuilding efforts, ensuring that such efforts are part of a larger strategy to build the foundation necessary for a negotiated and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace." This government has been clear; we are committed to pursuing a lasting solution to the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, including through achieving a two-state solution. We continue to support efforts to this end through our aid programmes, which assist civil society in Israel and Palestine on a range of issues, including peacebuilding and conflict resolution. We further support grassroots local peacebuilding efforts between Israeli and Palestinian civil society, for example on more inclusive and conflict-sensitive journalism.

■ **Mohammed Hamouda**

Ben Lake:

[\[18601\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 4 December 2024 to Question 15678 on Mohammed Hamouda, what information he has received on Dr Hamouda's (a) status and (b) well-being.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are concerned by the reports that Dr. Mohammed Hamouda was detained by the Israeli authorities on 6 November. I raised his case with the Israeli Ambassador on 18 November and FCDO officials have been following up the case since then. Whilst we do not comment on specific non-UK national cases, the government does raise International Humanitarian Law compliance regularly with Israel. Medical staff must be allowed to carry out their work unimpeded, and to travel around Gaza as needed.

■ **Nigeria: Malnutrition**

Kate Osamor:

[\[18581\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to help tackle malnutrition in northern Nigeria.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is providing support to tackle malnutrition in north-east Nigeria through the Humanitarian and Resilience Programme (HARP).

In 2024/25, the UK provided £12 million through HARP to UNICEF's Multisectoral Integrated Nutrition Action for Children, Adolescents and Women in North-East Nigeria (MINA) programme for prevention and treatment of malnutrition which aims to reach 500,000 children with life-saving support. HARP reduces mortality and increases resilience for people with the most severe humanitarian needs by (i) addressing food insecurity and malnutrition and (ii) protecting vulnerable people from harm.

Kate Osamor:

[\[18585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what bilateral funding to tackle malnutrition levels across northern Nigeria will be in 2025/26.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK is committed to tackling the increasing levels of malnutrition across northern Nigeria. The FCDO will make funding decisions for programming in 2025/26 in due course.

■ **Nigeria: Nutrition****Kate Osamor:**[\[18582\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is taking steps to expand (a) inpatient, (b) community-based, (c) outpatient and (d) other nutritional treatment services across northern Nigeria.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK supports access to essential life-saving health services in northern Nigeria through the Lafiya Programme. Lafiya supports the states of Kano, Kaduna, Jigawa, Borno and Yobe to strengthen their health systems to improve access for the poorest and most vulnerable people. This includes access to inpatient, outpatient and community-based services to detect and treat severe acute malnutrition. The UK invests in Global Nutrition programmes including the Child Nutrition Fund which provides 1:1 matched funding for Nigerian Federal and State governments to scale up resource allocation for nutrition, and financing for 6 million units of Micronutrient Supplements for pregnant women.

■ **Nigeria: Vaccination****Kate Osamor:**[\[18584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is taking steps to expand routine immunisation programs across northern Nigeria.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK supports immunisation programmes in Nigeria through our contributions to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), a public-private partnership that helps vaccinate more than half the world's children against some of the world's deadliest diseases. The UK's contribution to GAVI is £1.65 billion over five years (2021-2025). Nigeria will receive over \$1 billion in funding from GAVI between 2018 and 2028, one of the largest of any country.

The UK continues to work with the Government of Nigeria to strengthen health systems in northern Nigeria, which are crucial for ensuring access to life-saving vaccinations for the poorest and most vulnerable people.

■ **Palestinians: Fire and Rescue Services****Stephen Gethins:**[\[18869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 9 September to Question 3985 on Palestinians: Fire and Rescue Services, if he will take steps to help ensure the delivery of that donation.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK continues to call on Israel to increase humanitarian and commercial access into the Occupied Palestinian Territories by ensuring all aid crossings are fully operational, including the port of Ashdod. The Foreign Secretary recently spoke to Israeli Officials and raised the urgent need for a rapid increase in aid for those most in need. FCDO officials have raised the matter of this donation directly with the Israeli authorities. At a UK-chaired meeting of the UN Security Council on 12 November, Lord Collins called on Israel to immediately make good on its commitment to flood Gaza with aid. The Foreign Secretary reaffirmed these messages and the urgent need for a resolution at the UN Security Council on 18 November.

■ Sustainable Development: Drinking Water and Sanitation**Tim Roca:**[\[18821\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to meet sustainable development goal six.

Anneliese Dodds:

The UK works with governments and development partners to strengthen the delivery of climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services. We work to strengthen systems in six countries: Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi, Nepal and Bangladesh, and we support the Heads of State Initiative to gain high level political commitment for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 acceleration. Through this initiative, the President of Ghana recently committed \$1.7 billion for WASH-related SDG 6 targets. The UK is also implementing the £39m Just Transitions for Water Security programme, enhancing resilience for 40 million people in insecure countries through better planning, water governance and increased investment in water infrastructure.

■ Syria: British Nationals Abroad**Wendy Morton:**[\[19312\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many British nationals were in Syria on 11 December 2024.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are aware British nationals are located in Syria. Due to the shifting circumstances on the ground, we are not in a position to provide numbers.

■ Syria: Chemical Weapons**Alicia Kearns:**[\[19062\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the UK is participating in international action to (a) identify and (b) destroy chemical weapon (i) production sites and (ii) depots in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The brutal history of chemical weapons use in Syria must never be repeated. We have been closely monitoring developments as they unfold and engaging with partners in the region and with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We welcome Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) statement that it will protect chemical weapons sites and will not use chemical weapons under any circumstances. Syria must now take the next step, which is to comply with the obligations set out under UN Security Council Resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention and engage with the OPCW to declare fully its chemical weapons programme so that it can finally, and verifiably, be completely destroyed.

■ **Syria: Fenethylamine****Alicia Kearns:**[\[19060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to (a) identify and (b) destroy Captagon (i) production and (ii) distribution facilities in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are concerned by the growth of the Captagon industry, which as well as enriching the former Assad regime, is fuelling regional instability and generating vast revenues for criminal gangs and armed groups in Syria and across the region. We are working with international partners, including partners in the region, to raise awareness of the risks posed by Captagon. The UK has imposed sanctions on 11 individuals involved in facilitating the Captagon industry in Syria.

Alicia Kearns:[\[19061\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the (a) identification and (b) destruction of Captagon production facilities in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

We are concerned by the growth of the Captagon industry, which as well as enriching the former Assad regime is fuelling regional instability and generating vast revenues for criminal gangs and armed groups in Syria and across the region. We are working with international partners, including partners in the region, to raise awareness of the risks posed by Captagon. The UK has imposed sanctions on 11 individuals involved in facilitating the Captagon industry in Syria.

■ **Syria: Humanitarian Aid****Rupert Lowe:**[\[18755\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will provide a breakdown of planned spending for the additional £11 million in humanitarian aid for Syria.

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18756\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he plans to take to ensure that the £11 million in aid for Syria reaches its intended recipients.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK continues to support those in need across Syria where it is safe to do so. Through NGOs and UN organisations, we are providing food, healthcare and other life-saving assistance.

The additional £11 million of humanitarian aid for the people of Syria includes £6 million to the UN Humanitarian Pooled Funds, £4 million to the Aid Fund for Northern Syria, and an additional £1 million to NGOs operating across all of Syria.

As with all our work, we have extensive controls in place to ensure our aid reaches those who need it.

Wendy Morton:

[\[19306\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK is calling on all parties to support humanitarian access, including access and protection for humanitarian workers in all regions of Syria. We are working closely with humanitarian and international partners to get a fuller picture of the situation, assess impacts and needs and determine how best to respond.

The UK continues to support those in need across Syria where it is safe to do so. Through NGOs and UN organisations, we are providing food, healthcare and other life-saving assistance. The additional £11 million of humanitarian aid for the people of Syria includes £6 million to the UN Humanitarian Pooled Funds, £4 million to the Aid Fund for Northern Syria, and an additional £1 million to NGOs operating across all of Syria. As with all our work, we have extensive controls in place to ensure our aid reaches those who need it.

■ Syria: Politics and Government

Uma Kumaran:

[\[19185\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts about (a) the role the UK will play in restarting Syria's political process and (b) a timeline for political transition that enables free elections.

Mr Hamish Falconer:

The UK is speaking regularly to regional and other partners about the situation in Syria. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to the UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and a number of regional counterparts. I have also discussed developments in Syria with regional partners and Syrian civil society actors.

The focus of discussions has been on protecting civilians, including minorities, and moving quickly to a political transition. It is essential that this transition is inclusive, comprehensive and most importantly determined by the Syrian people themselves. The UK will continue to engage closely with Syrian contacts, international and regional partners to support a peaceful political transition.

■ Syria: Religious Freedom

Mary Glendon: [\[18367\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will take steps to prevent the religious persecution of Christians in Syria.

Mary Glendon: [\[18368\]](#)

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

Mr Hamish Falconer:

Recent events in Syria have been extraordinary, and we have been closely monitoring the treatment of religious minorities. From the opposition offensive in North West Syria on 27 November to Assad fleeing Syria this weekend, our call for the protection of all civilians, including religious minorities, has been consistent. No one should live in fear because of their beliefs, and our dedication to upholding the right of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Syria will continue during its political transition. As the Foreign Secretary stated on 9 December, the Government's priority is the protection of all civilians. Promoting FoRB is crucial for building a sustainable future for all Syrians, advancing cultural and religious diversity, and ensuring equality and human dignity for all.

■ Ukraine: Reconstruction

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [\[18765\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he plans to authorise the use of frozen Russian state assets to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine.

Stephen Doughty:

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

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Air Ambulance Services: Employers' Contributions

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst: [\[19146\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of increases in employers National Insurance contributions on the (a) provision and (b) resilience of air ambulance services.

Karin Smyth:
No such assessment has been made. 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 National Insurance contributions (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.

■ Ambulance Services: Vehicles

Edward Argar: [\[19320\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many ambulances were in use in the NHS in (a) September, (b) October and (c) November 2024.

Karin Smyth:
[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: This information requested is not held centrally by the Department.

■ Cancer: Health Services

Clive Jones: [\[R\]](#) [\[19805\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department holds on the average cost of (a) bowel and (b) all cancer care at stage (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3 and (iv) 4 for patients referred by the NHS in England.

Andrew Gwynne:
There is currently no available data on the average cost, broken down into cost per stage, of bowel cancer, or all cancer care. However, the following table shows the cost of cancer treatment in National Health Service trusts, reported over the last five years:

YEAR	COST
2019/20	£3,800,000,000
2020/21	£4,100,000,000
2021/22	£4,300,000,000

YEAR	COST
2022/23	£5,600,000,000
2023/24	Not available

Source: the data is based on Patient Level Costing submissions from NHS trusts, and other data submissions

Note: the data shows the cost of activities recorded against primary cancer ICD10 codes.

This will not include all costs associated with cancer treatment if these are not recorded or linked in the data, for example some diagnostics. It excludes primary care, independent sector, non-NHS activities, and data from some trusts who were excluded from the cost submission for underlying data issues.

Clive Jones:

[R] [\[19825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the oral contribution of the Minister of State for Health in response to the question from the hon. Member of Wokingham of Wednesday 11 December, Official Report, column 290WH, how his Department plans to collect evidence for the national cancer plan.

Andrew Gwynne:

I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave the Hon. Member for York Central on 11 November 2024 to Question [12437](#).

■ Care Workers: Mental Health Services

Edward Morello:

[\[19585\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve mental health support for social care workers.

Stephen Kinnock:

Most social care workers are employed by private sector providers who set their pay and terms and conditions, including any occupational health or wellbeing support, independent of the central Government.

We recognise the scale of reforms needed to make the adult social care sector attractive, to support sustainable workforce growth, and to improve the retention of the domestic workforce. We want it to be regarded as a profession, and for the people who work in care to be respected as professionals. We are introducing the first ever Fair Pay Agreement to the adult social care sector so that care professionals are recognised and rewarded for the important work that they do.

■ Clinical Trials

Clive Jones: [R] [18281]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress his Department has made on (a) improving the process for clinical trials and (b) ensuring that those trials are more accessible for teenagers and young adults.

Andrew Gwynne:

In order to maximise our potential to be a world leader and develop a more competitive, efficient, and accessible clinical research system, the Department is committed to implementing recommendations from Lord O'Shaughnessy's independent review of commercial clinical trials in full.

Significant progress has already been made to reform the clinical research system. The Department has streamlined the costing and contracting activities for commercial sponsors by introducing the National Contract Value Review as a standardised system-wide process, supported by the Department's research delivery arm, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). As reported in October 2024, the proportion of NIHR portfolio studies delivering to time and target is currently greater than 80%, and overall recruitment, including recruitment into commercial contract studies on the NIHR Portfolio, continues to exceed pre-COVID-19 levels.

The Department is committed to ensuring that clinical trials are people-centred and more accessible, including for teenagers and young adults. For example, the NIHR provides an online service called Be Part of Research which promotes participation in health and care research by allowing users to search for relevant studies and register their interest.

■ Colonoscopy

Clive Jones: [R] [19535]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the proportion of patients that have received a colonoscopy and subsequently been referred to cancer treatment pathways in each of the last five years.

Andrew Gwynne:

No estimate has been made regarding the proportion of patients, in each of the last five years, who received a colonoscopy, and who were then referred to a cancer treatment pathway. The following table shows the proportion of patients who received a colonoscopy and who were subsequently referred to cancer treatment pathways:

YEAR	NUMBER OF COLONOSCOPIES	NUMBER OF NEW COLORECTAL CANCER DIAGNOSES	PROPORTION OF COLONOSCOPIES THAT RESULTED IN A COLORECTAL CANCER DIAGNOSIS
2020	310,616	33,334	10.7%

YEAR	NUMBER OF COLONOSCOPIES	NUMBER OF NEW COLORECTAL CANCER DIAGNOSES	PROPORTION OF COLONOSCOPIES THAT RESULTED IN A COLORECTAL CANCER DIAGNOSIS
2021	483,969	40,847	8.4%
2022	465,646	39,208	8.4%
2023	-	40,449	-
2024	-	22,792	-

Source: data on the number of colonoscopies undertaken per annum in England is from the Fingertips data collection, and data on the number of colorectal cancer diagnosis per annum in England is from the CancerData data collection, with further information on both available, respectively, at the following two links:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/> <https://www.cancerdata.nhs.uk/> Note: data on the number of new colorectal cancer diagnoses is incomplete for 2024.

Patients may receive a colonoscopy for a variety of different health reasons including, but not limited to, cancer. The Government and the National Health Service are taking crucial steps to improve cancer outcomes for patients across England, including for those with bowel cancer.

■ Coronavirus: Vaccination

Sadik Al-Hassan:

[19193]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of limiting eligibility for the covid-19 vaccination in autumn 2025 on (a) the economy, (b) workforce absenteeism and (c) productivity losses.

Andrew Gwynne:

The independent Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advises the Department on the approach to vaccination and immunisation. On 13 November 2024, the JCVI published advice on the COVID-19 vaccination programme, covering vaccination in 2025 and spring 2026. This advice is available at the following link:

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

The Government is considering the JCVI's advice on autumn 2025 carefully and will respond in due course.

Calum Miller:

[19591]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of including people with post-Covid syndrome in the list of people qualified for an autumn booster vaccine.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The Government is committed to protecting those most vulnerable to COVID-19 through vaccination, as guided by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI stated in its advice for the autumn 2024 COVID-19 vaccination programme that there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the impact of additional vaccine doses, beyond the primary vaccination, on the risk, progression, and outcome of post-COVID syndromes. The JCVI advised that better data is needed on the impact of additional vaccine doses on the occurrence and severity of post-COVID syndromes in the current era of Omicron sub-variants of the COVID-19 virus, and high population immunity. This advice is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-autumn-2024-vaccination-programme-jcvi-advice-8-april-2024/jcvi-statement-on-the-covid-19-vaccination-programme-for-autumn-2024-8-april-2024>

On 13 November 2024, the JCVI published advice on the COVID-19 vaccination programme in spring 2025, autumn 2025 and spring 2026. This advice is available at the following link:

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

The Government has accepted the JCVI's advice on eligibility for the spring 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme. The Government is considering the advice for autumn 2025 and spring 2026 carefully, and will respond in due course.

Sojan Joseph:

[19956]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2024 to Question 18797 on Coronavirus: Vaccination, how many of the claims relating to Covid-19 vaccination that have gone to tribunal have resulted in the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme Payment being awarded to the applicant.

Andrew Gwynne:

As of 1 December 2024, 49 appeals linked to COVID-19 vaccinations have been escalated to tribunal. Eight of these appeals have now concluded, with zero resulting in a payment being awarded.

■ Dementia: Music Therapy**Alicia Kearns:** [19409]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his plans for a National Care Service include a review of training for carers in the use of musical techniques to help support people living with dementia.

Stephen Kinnock:

There are no current plans for a review of training for carers in the use of musical techniques to help support people living with dementia. However, the Department currently funds research on the use of musical techniques for people living with dementia via the National Institute for Health and Care Research. This includes a major study investigating how music therapy can reduce patient distress and physical assaults on National Health Service inpatient wards for people with dementia. The study is called MELODIC and will create a programme of music therapy which will be piloted in two NHS mental health wards at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust.

■ Dental Services: Knowsley**Anneliese Midgley:** [19099]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of dentistry provision in Knowsley constituency for (a) children and (b) adults.

Stephen Kinnock:

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

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

The data for the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board, which includes the Knowsley constituency, shows that 46% of adults were seen by a National Health Service dentist in the previous 24 months, compared to 40% in England, and that 62% of children were seen by an NHS dentist in the previous 12 months, compared to 56% in England.

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

Anneliese Midgley: [19100]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) children and (b) adults are registered with an NHS dentist in Knowsley constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

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

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

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist/>

Anneliese Midgley:**[19103]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of dental practices that accept new NHS patients in Knowsley constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government will tackle the immediate crisis with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and to recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contract, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of National Health Service dentists. NHS dentists are required to update their NHS.UK website profiles at least every 90 days, to ensure patients have up-to-date information on where they can access care.

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

■ Department of Health and Social Care: Alcoholic Drinks**Cat Smith:****[19337]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many alcohol industry representatives Ministers in his Department have met since July 2024.

Andrew Gwynne:

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK website. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

■ Domestic Abuse: Older People**Helen Grant:****[19275]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of legal protections against the (a) abuse and (b) neglect of older people.

Stephen Kinnock:

Any form of elder abuse or neglect is unacceptable.

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

■ **Drinking Water: Fluoride****Tim Roca:****[19189]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to support a fluoridation scheme in Macclesfield constituency.

Stephen Kinnock:

There are no current plans to support a fluoridation scheme in Macclesfield. Public consultation is required on proposals for new, or the expansion of existing, community water fluoridation schemes. The Water Fluoridation (Consultation) (England) Regulations 2022 set out the requirements, and are available at the following link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/1163/contents/made>.

■ **Food: Hygiene****Tristan Osborne:****[19912]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of mandating the display of restaurant food hygiene ratings in all English licenced premises assessed.

Tristan Osborne:**[19919]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a statutory food hygiene rating scheme in England.

Andrew Gwynne:

The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is operated by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in partnership with local authorities across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

We will consider whether the mandatory display of ratings should be introduced in England in due course. In the meantime, the FSA is working with its local authority partners to maintain and improve the impact and benefits of this highly successful public health scheme.

■ General Practitioners: Internet

Jess Brown-Fuller:

[\[19588\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate his Department has made of the number of GP appointments that have been booked through online forms as a result of the Help Us Help you advertising scheme since the inception of that scheme.

Stephen Kinnock:

To date, no Help Us Help You national advertising activity has promoted the use of online consultation request forms in general practice.

■ General Practitioners: Temporary Accommodation

Mike Amesbury:

[\[18995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether families including a (a) baby and (b) young child in temporary accommodation are able to remain registered at their GP surgery if they still live (i) in the area and (ii) outside the area but within reasonable travelling distance.

Stephen Kinnock:

Patients have the legal right to choose a general practice (GP) that best suits their needs. To ensure a sufficient distribution of GPs for all patients in England, GPs are required to agree to an area within which they will accept patients onto their list. However, GPs can register patients from outside their catchment areas, without a duty to provide home visits for such patients. A practice may grant continued permanent registration to a patient who has moved outside of its practice area, provided that patient has not registered with another practice as a permanent patient.

Practices have a contractual duty to provide emergency treatment and immediately necessary treatment free of charge for up to 14 days to anyone within their practice area who isn't registered with another provider of essential services.

■ Givinostat

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[19190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many patients were in receipt of Givinostat through the Early Access Programme on 10 December 2024; and if he will make an assessment of the potential barriers to accessing the Early Access Programme by patients.

Karin Smyth:

The information on how many patients were in receipt of givinostat through the Early Access Programme (EAP) on 10 December 2024 is not held centrally, as the scheme was set up by the manufacturer.

We have made no assessment of access to the EAP for givinostat, which must be through one of the 23 NorthStar Centres in the United Kingdom. However, participation in the EAP is decided at an individual National Health Service trust level,

and a North Star Centre will not be able to provide givinostat if its local trust has not approved participation. Under the EAP, givinostat is free to both patients taking part in it and to the NHS, but the NHS trusts must still cover the cost of administering it to patients. Only Duchenne muscular dystrophy clinicians can make requests for givinostat for their patients. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis for individual named patients aligned to the eligibility criteria.

■ Health Services: Standards

Mr Will Forster:

[\[19577\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help improve NHS provision of (a) dental care for pregnant women, (b) radiography services for cancer patients, (c) GP access in areas with significant housing developments and (d) audiology services.

Stephen Kinnock:

Pregnant women and new mothers are entitled to free National Health Service dental care. The responsibility for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of the local population has been delegated to the integrated care boards (ICBs) across England. For the Woking constituency, this is the NHS Surrey Heartlands ICB.

We will get the NHS diagnosing cancer earlier and treating it faster, so more patients survive, and we will improve patients' experience across the system. We will also be spending £70 million on new radiotherapy machines, to ensure the most advanced treatment is available to the patients who need it.

We are aware of the additional demand and challenges placed upon primary care infrastructure by rapid housing development. We are working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address this issue.

The NHS has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient medical services, including general practices, in each local area, with funding and commissioning reflecting population growth and demographic changes.

■ HIV Infection: Health Services

Kate Osborne:

[\[19784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to integrate HIV (a) prevention and (b) care into the broader health system.

Kate Osborne:

[\[19786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will ensure that the new HIV Action Plan includes culturally competent interventions.

Kate Osborne:

[\[19787\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what role the voluntary sector will play in the new HIV Action Plan; and what steps he will take to support that role.

Andrew Gwynne:

HIV is a priority for the Government, and we have commissioned a new HIV Action Plan to end new HIV transmissions within England by 2030. Integration of services and strengthening the delivery of HIV prevention and care will be key objectives of the plan, which we aim to publish in summer 2025.

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) has been a key partner in the development and implementation of the existing HIV Action Plan, and will continue to be a key partner in the new plan. The Terrence Higgins Trust, the Elton John AIDS Foundation, and the National AIDS Trust have led engagement with the VCS and the wider community to develop recommendations for the new plan, including relating to culturally competent interventions. These were published on 25 November and will be considered in the development of the new HIV Action Plan.

In addition, as part of its HIV Prevention England programme, the Department will host three further engagement sessions with the VCS during February and March 2025, including patients with lived experience.

■ Hospices: Employers' Contributions**Jack Rankin:**[\[19209\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to support hospices that rely on charitable donations, in the context of changes to National Insurance thresholds.

Stephen Kinnock:

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

The Government recognises the need to protect the smallest businesses and charities, like hospices, which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of businesses with ENICs liabilities either gain or see no change next year. Businesses and charities will still be able to claim ENICs reliefs, including those for under 21 and under 25 year old apprentices, where eligible. The Department will set out further details on the allocation of funding for next year in due course.

■ Hydrocephalus: Babies**Monica Harding:**[\[19567\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what proportion of infants with hydrocephalus initially present symptoms after 8 weeks of age.

Andrew Gwynne:

It is vitally important that babies are diagnosed as early as possible so treatment can be provided. Current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

guidance recommends measuring the head circumference of babies in the first week, at approximately eight weeks, and at other times only if there are concerns. The baby’s general practitioner, or nominated primary care examiner, has responsibility for ensuring the six-to-eight-week newborn infant physical examination screen, where head size is measured, is completed for all registered babies. The Department is seeking advice from the NICE and the royal colleges on the value of a clinical review of the current guidelines surrounding infant head circumference.

The Healthy Child Programme sets out the requirements for health visiting services, including five mandated reviews, where the child’s health and development is assessed. This includes when the baby is 10 to 14 days old, and at six to eight weeks old, as well as additional contacts depending on need, providing an opportunity to identify any health or development concerns and to make appropriate referrals. The Department and the NHS National Disease Registration Service do not hold information on the proportion of infants diagnosed after eight weeks.

■ **Influenza: Vaccination**

Edward Argar: [19698]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what funding was allocated to promote the update of the influenza vaccine in (a) 2022, (b) 2023 and (c) 2024.

Andrew Gwynne:
The annual winter vaccination communications campaign supports the uptake of seasonal vaccinations for influenza and COVID-19 amongst eligible cohorts. This is an integrated campaign, so spend cannot be separated out by vaccine. The budget for the marketing campaign covers the Department, the National Health Service, and the UK Health Security Agency. The following table shows the allocations for winter vaccines promotion, for each of the last three years:

YEAR	BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR WINTER VACCINES PROMOTION
2022	£3,020,000
2023	£4,400,000
2024	£6,000,000

Each year, the campaign combines paid-for marketing and partnerships with earned national media, and social and stakeholder engagement, to raise awareness of the potential benefits of winter vaccinations and how they can be accessed by the public.

■ **Members: Correspondence**

Andrew Griffith: [19428]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when he plans to respond to the letter of 20 November 2024 from the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The Department endeavours to meet the cross-Government standard of 20 working days for MP responses.

■ **Migraines: Health Services**

Alex Easton:

[\[19182\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) improve support, (b) ensure equitable access to specialist services and (c) promote workplace adjustments for people living with migraine; and what plans he has to work with local health boards to (i) review the level of need for migraine-specific services and (ii) ensure appropriate provision.

Andrew Gwynne:

As health is a devolved matter, no plans have been made to work with local health boards to review the level of need for migraine-specific services and ensure appropriate provision. In England, NHS England is responsible for allocating funding to integrated care boards (ICBs), which are, in turn, responsible for commissioning specialist migraine services that meet the needs of their populations, subject to local prioritisation and funding.

The process of commissioning services should take into account best practice guidance, such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's (NICE) guidance on the diagnosis and management of headaches in over 12-year-olds, which was updated in December 2021. The NICE guideline provides recommendations on principles of care for people with migraines, which may include a multidisciplinary approach to care, based on clinical need, and involving access to a range of health professionals, including specialist neurology nurses, neurologists, and pain management specialists. Whilst NICE guidelines are not mandatory, the Government expects the healthcare system to take them fully into account when designing services.

Occupational health as advisory support has a broad remit. It plays an important role in supporting employers to maintain and promote employee health and wellbeing through assessments of fitness for work, advice about reasonable adjustments, work ability or return to work plans, and signposting to treatment for specific conditions such as migraines.

■ **NHS: Staff**

Edward Argar:

[\[19322\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many NHS (a) 111 and (b) 999 call handlers there were on (i) 1 September, (ii) 1 October, (iii) 1 November and (iv) 1 December 2024.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: This information is not available. While NHS England collects information on the number of call handlers working in NHS 111 and 999 services, this information has not been centrally validated.

■ Obesity: Health Services**Kate Osborne:**[\[19782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to reduce levels of obesity in (a) Jarrow and Gateshead East constituency and (b) other constituencies with high rates of obesity; and if he will take steps to support dietitian-led weight management programmes in such areas.

Kate Osborne:[\[19783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional funding for community-based health initiatives in (a) Jarrow and Gateshead East constituency and (b) other constituencies with high rates of obesity.

Andrew Gwynne:

Local authorities and the National Health Service provide weight management services to support their communities to achieve and maintain a healthier weight. These range from behavioural weight management programmes, to specialist services for those living with obesity and associated co-morbidities. Local authorities are able to spend funding from the Public Health Grant on behavioural weight management services, whilst integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning NHS specialist weight management services. Local authorities and ICBs should consider local population need and the relevant guidance when commissioning and designing services, including when considering how the service should be led or the intervention delivered.

The North East and North Cumbria ICB is developing its Healthy Weight and Treating Obesity strategy. Additionally, NHS England commissions the NHS Digital Weight Management Programme nationally for people living with obesity, with an existing comorbidity of either diabetes, hypertension, or both. The 12-week online programme is available to eligible people across England, including in the Jarrow and Gateshead East constituency, via direct referral from any general practice or Community Pharmacy.

The Government will take action to tackle the root causes of the obesity crisis head on, including through shifting the focus from treatment to prevention. We have made a strong start, including laying the necessary secondary legislation to implement the advertising restrictions for less healthy food or drink on television and online from 1 October 2025, taking steps to ensure the Soft Drinks Industry Levy remains effective and fit-for-purpose, and giving local authorities the stronger, clearer powers they have told us they need to block new fast food outlets near schools.

■ Palliative Care: Employers' Contributions

Susan Murray:

[\[19502\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of changes made to employer National Insurance contributions at the Autumn Budget 2024 on access to palliative care.

Susan Murray:

[\[19503\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to ensure palliative care standards are maintained for an aging population.

Stephen Kinnock:

The delivery of palliative and end of life care services is a devolved matter.

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

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

■ Pancreatic Cancer: Diagnosis and Health Education

Jim Shannon:

[\[19300\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help (a) raise awareness of the symptoms and (b) reduce the number of misdiagnoses of pancreatic cancer.

Andrew Gwynne:

NHS England is already taking steps to deliver a range of interventions to improve awareness of pancreatic cancer symptoms. NHS England runs Help Us Help You campaigns to increase knowledge of cancer symptoms and address barriers to acting on them, to encourage people to come forward as soon as possible to see their general practitioner. The campaigns focus on a range of symptoms, including symptoms of pancreatic cancer, as well as encouraging body awareness, to help people spot symptoms across a wide range of cancers at an early point.

NHS England is also working with Pancreatic Cancer UK to develop a public-facing Family History Checker, which enables people, and their families, affected by pancreatic cancer to self-assess if they have inherited risk. People identified of being at risk are referred directly to the European Registry of Hereditary Pancreatic Diseases research trail, which aims to understand inherited conditions of the pancreas. Referrals to the trail can be made by any healthcare professional across all health sectors, or by individuals via self-referral.

Improving early diagnosis and reducing misdiagnosis of cancer is a priority for NHS England. The Department is committed to improving waiting times for cancer treatment across England. We will start by delivering an extra 40,000 operations, scans, and appointments each week, as the first step to ensuring early diagnosis and faster treatment. To help increase cancer diagnosis rates, we are continuing with the roll out of Community Diagnostic Centres to ensure that patients can access the diagnostic tests they need as quickly as possible. The National Health Service is improving pathways to get people diagnosed faster once they are referred, and is looking into alternative routes into the system, including non-specific symptom pathways for patients who do not fit clearly into a single urgent cancer referral pathway, but who are at risk of being diagnosed with cancer. This will help support faster pancreatic cancer diagnosis and seek to prevent misdiagnosis.

■ Pharmacy: Access

Jim Shannon:

[18942]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to ensure that pharmacies are accessible.

Stephen Kinnock:

Local Authorities' Health and Wellbeing boards have statutory responsibility to assess if the local provision of pharmaceutical services meets the populations needs, publishes these assessments (PNAs) every three years, and keeps these assessments up to date. The PNAs inform integrated care board commissioning decisions.

■ Postural Tachycardia Syndrome

Mr Luke Charters:

[19155]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to (a) raise awareness of Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), and (b) support children with this condition in York Outer constituency.

Andrew Gwynne:

To improve awareness of postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (PoTS) amongst healthcare professionals, and specifically general practitioners (GPs), the Royal College of General Practitioners provides training on PoTS as part of its Syncope toolkit, which is available at the following link:

<https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/view.php?id=500>

In addition, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has produced a clinical knowledge summary on blackouts and syncope, last updated in November 2023, which outlines how clinicians should assess and diagnosis PoTS. It is available at the following link:

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/blackouts-syncope/diagnosis/assessment/>

GPs are asked to investigate symptoms to ensure that it is not misdiagnosed. Following referral, patients are treated within National Health Service cardiology and neurology services. Where more specialist advice is required, a referral will be made to an appropriate clinician.

Services for children with PoTS are locally commissioned and, as such, it is the responsibility integrated care boards (ICBs), including Humber and North Yorkshire ICB, which serves the York Outer constituency, to ensure that they commission services meet the needs of their local population.

■ Primary Health Care

Steve Darling:

[\[19483\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will issue guidance to integrated care boards on representation for NHS Primary Care stakeholders.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Health and Care Act 2022 sets out the legislative minimum integrated care board (ICB) membership requirement, with a mandated partner member nominated for primary medical services, along with nominated partner members from the National Health Service trusts and local authorities to bring knowledge and a perspective from their sectors. ICBs can exceed the legislative minimum requirements for ICB membership to address local needs, which may include additional representation from a diverse range of stakeholders, including primary care. Currently there are no plans to issue any guidance on representation of NHS primary care stakeholders.

■ Self-harm: Young People

Melanie Ward:

[\[19556\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many incidents of self-harm using (a) paracetamol, (b) ibuprofen and (c) aspirin by 16 and 17-year-olds were recorded in each of the last five years.

Stephen Kinnock:

The information requested is not held centrally.

■ Smoking: Young People

Sir Christopher Chope:

[\[19232\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment of the probability of an increase in youth smoking rates of illegal tobacco products as a result of the implementation of a generational ban on tobacco sales.

Andrew Gwynne:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: Smoking is still the biggest killer. It claims approximately 80,000 lives a year and puts huge pressure on our National Health Service, and costs taxpayers billions. By creating the first smoke-free generation we are stopping people from ever starting smoking. Our published modelling shows that

smoking rates in England for 14 to 30-year-olds could be close to 0% as early as 2050, from an estimated 11.2% in 2023.

Evidence shows that when we have introduced targeted tobacco control measures, they have had a positive impact on tackling the problems of illicit tobacco.

Consumption of illicit cigarettes has gone from 15 billion cigarettes in 2000/2001 to 1.5 billion cigarettes in 2022/2023.

In 2007, the legal age of sale for tobacco products was raised from 16 to 18 years old, which helped reduce youth smoking rates in children aged 11 to 15 years old from 9% in 2005, to less than 1.1% in 2021. This age increase created 1.3 million more people who were no longer able to be sold cigarettes, and who in theory would be in the market for illicit cigarettes. However, in practice the number of illicit cigarettes consumed fell by 25%, from 10 billion in 2005/06 to 7.5 billion in 2007/08.

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

■ Social Services: Rural Areas

Edward Morello:

[\[19584\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to address (a) recruitment and (b) retention in adult social care in rural areas.

Stephen Kinnock:

The Government recognises the scale of reforms needed to make the adult social care sector attractive, to support sustainable workforce growth, and improve the retention of the domestic workforce.

We are introducing the first ever Fair Pay Agreement to the adult social care sector, so that care professionals are recognised and rewarded for the important work they do. Fair Pay Agreements will empower worker representatives, employers, and others to negotiate pay, and terms and conditions in a regulated and responsible manner.

■ Spinal Injuries: Women

Helen Morgan:

[\[19457\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to provide (a) comprehensive healthcare guidance on and (b) access to specialised gynaecological support for (i) the management of menstruation, (ii) contraception options, (iii) safe pregnancy care and (iv) other related matters for people with spinal cord injuries.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The Government will prioritise women's health, placing women's equality at the heart of our agenda, and ensuring that women's

health is never neglected again. NHS England Specialised Commissioning has a Clinical Reference Group (CRG) for specialised women's services that provides clinical advice and leadership for complex obstetrics and maternity, and complex gynaecology and fertility preservation services. Specialist gynaecological services are commissioned in line with the service specification published by the CRG.

Furthermore, there is a CRG for rehabilitation, and complex disability and spinal cord injury services. Specialist services for spinal cord injuries are commissioned in line with the service specification published by the CRG. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence also has guidance on the assessment and early management of spinal cord injuries, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng41>

Menstrual problems and symptoms, such as heavy or painful periods, are common and can have a significant impact on women and girls' wellbeing, and their participation in education and the workplace. We also recognise that having a spinal cord injury can create additional challenges for women and girls when it comes to managing their period. A range of treatments are available and can help manage menstrual symptoms and gynaecological conditions. Women and girls should contact their general practice (GP) if menstrual problems are affecting their daily life.

In November 2023, NHS England published a decision support tool for managing heavy periods. This tool supports women's understanding of their symptoms and appropriate treatment options, to support discussion with clinicians.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) has published a Women's Health Library which brings together educational resources and guidelines on women's health from the RCGP, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare. This resource is continually updated to ensure GPs and other primary healthcare professionals have the most up-to-date advice, to provide the best care for their patients.

We are committed to ensuring that the public receives equitable access to the best possible contraceptive services. Different methods of contraception are available from a range of different settings, including direct from pharmacies, both prescribed and over the counter, from GPs, and from local authority commissioned sexual and reproductive health services.

The NHS Pharmacy Contraception Service was launched in April 2023, enabling pharmacists to issue ongoing supplies of contraception initiated in GP surgeries and sexual health services. The service relaunched in December 2023 to enable community pharmacies to also initiate oral contraception. This service offers greater choice in how people can access contraception services. It will also create additional capacity in GP and sexual health clinics to support meeting the demand for more complex assessments.

The Government will continue to work with the NHS as it delivers its three-year maternity and neonatal plan to grow our maternity workforce, develop a culture of safety, and ensure women and babies receive safe, compassionate care.

Helen Morgan:

[19458]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to help reduce the risks of (a) uterine prolapse and (b) osteoporosis among women with spinal cord injuries through (i) improved access to preventive care, (ii) diagnosis and (iii) long-term management strategies.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The Government will prioritise women's health, placing women's equality at the heart of our agenda, and ensuring that women's health is never neglected again. Symptoms of uterine prolapse can usually be improved with pelvic floor exercises and lifestyle changes, but sometimes medical treatment is needed. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has produced guidance on the management of pelvic organ prolapse in women, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng123>

For patients who need surgery for uterine prolapse, the NHS England Specialised Commissioning Clinical Reference Group for specialised women's services has produced a service specification for specialised complex surgery for urinary incontinence and vaginal and uterine prolapse, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/service-specification-specialised-complex-surgery-for-urinary-incontinence-and-vaginal-and-uterine-prolapse-16-years-and-above/>

The implications of musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions, such as osteoporosis, for women's health cannot not be overlooked. MSK conditions disproportionately impact women. One in three women will experience an osteoporotic fracture in their lifetime, compared to one in five men. Women are more at risk of developing osteoporosis due to hormone changes that happen at the menopause, and directly affect bone density.

For all people, including those with spinal injuries, regular exercise and healthy eating are important factors in preventing osteoporosis. Weight-bearing exercise and resistance exercise are particularly important for improving bone density and helping to prevent osteoporosis. Eating foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, or taking vitamin D supplements, is also an important way people can maintain their bone health and reduce their risk of osteoporosis.

The drug Raloxifene is also recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for the primary prevention of osteoporotic fragility fractures in postmenopausal women. In addition, the Government is committed to expanding access to Fracture Liaison Services. Fracture Liaison Services are a globally recognised secondary fracture prevention model for those with osteoporosis, which

can reduce the risk of refracture by up to 40%. With NHS England, we are considering a range of options to identify the most effective ways of improving the quality of, and access to, the Fracture Liaison Service model and the interventions it provides.

To support early diagnosis of osteoporosis, including in those with spinal cord injuries, the Government is investing £1.5 billion capital funding in 2025/26 for new surgical hubs and diagnostic scanners to build capacity for over 30,000 additional procedures and over 1.25 million diagnostic tests as they come online.

Helen Morgan:

[19459]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that women with spinal cord injuries receive adequate postnatal support including (a) breast feeding assistance and (b) tailored rehabilitation services.

Karin Smyth:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: The Government will prioritise women's health, placing women's equality at the heart of our agenda and ensuring women's health is never again neglected. According to NHS England's guidance, all women who have given birth should be offered a check-up with their general practice six to eight weeks after giving birth. The check-up will cover a range of topics such as mental health, physical recovery, breastfeeding, and support with family planning. NHS England is also rolling out perinatal pelvic health services to reduce rates of perineal tears, and maternal mental health services to provide additional mental health support and improve outcomes for women.

We know that breastfeeding has significant benefits for both mother and baby. The Government is committed to achieving the healthiest generation of children ever, and central to this is our commitment to give every baby the best start in life. This includes helping families to achieve their breastfeeding goals. It is important that all families are supported to make the right choice for them and have prompt and easy access to high-quality advice and services to help them achieve their infant feeding goals.

The Department is working closely with 75 local authorities across England to improve their infant feeding services, including breastfeeding support, through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. These services are helping families to access face-to-face and virtual infant feeding support whenever they need it, and in a location that suits them. This could be at home, in their family hub, or in a hospital setting.

We want to build on the actions that local areas are already taking through the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme to improve their infant feeding services. At a national level, families across the United Kingdom can access round-the-clock support and advice on breastfeeding through the National Breastfeeding Helpline.

The Department recognises the profound impact that spinal injuries can have on an individual and their loved ones, and the importance of early access to high-quality neurorehabilitation. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has

produced guidance on rehabilitation after traumatic injury, which includes specific recommendations regarding rehabilitation for those with spinal injuries. Further information is available at the following link:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng211>

HOME OFFICE

■ Arrests: Great Yarmouth

Rupert Lowe: [20084]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many foreign national offenders were arrested in Great Yarmouth constituency in each of the last 10 years.

Dame Angela Eagle:

This data is not collected centrally, and could only be collated and verified for the purposes of answering this question at disproportionate cost.

■ Asylum: Hotels

Wendy Morton: [18553]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum hotels had been closed as of 4 July 2024.

Wendy Morton: [18554]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum hotels were opened in (a) July, (b) August, (c) September, (d) October and (e) November 2024.

Wendy Morton: [18555]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum seekers were housed in hotels as of 30 November 2024.

Dame Angela Eagle:

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

The Home Secretary took immediate action by restarting asylum processing and scrapping the unworkable Rwanda policy. This will save an estimated £4 billion for the taxpayer over the next two years. We are delivering a major uplift in returns to remove people with no right to be in the UK. Over the long term this will allow us to end the use of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers as part of our programme to reduce overall asylum costs.

Data on the number of supported asylum seekers in accommodation, including hotels, can be found within the Asy_D11 tab for our most recent statistics release: [Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables)(opens in a new tab).

Joani Reid: [18719]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many residents are accommodated at the Bruce Hotel in East Kilbride.

Joani Reid: [18720]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the average length of time is for asylum seekers to spend in the Bruce Hotel in East Kilbride.

Joani Reid: [18721]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what the (a) age, (b) gender and (c) country of origin is of asylum seekers living at the Bruce Hotel in East Kilbride.

Dame Angela Eagle:

For the safety and security of residents and staff at its accommodation sites, the Home Office does not publish detail of each site in use.

However, data on the number of supported asylum seekers in accommodation, by local authority and accommodation type, can be found within the Asy_D11 tab for the most recent stats release: Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk.)

Joani Reid: [18722]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people living at the Bruce Hotel in East Kilbride have been granted asylum in the past 12 months.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the [‘Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release’](#). Data on grants at initial decision is published in table Asy_D02 of the [‘Asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement detailed datasets’](#). The latest data relates to the year ending September 2024. Data on grants of refugee status by location or accommodation type is not published.

■ Asylum: Syria

Rupert Lowe: [18745]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to pause asylum applications made by people from Syria, in the context of the fall of the Assad regime.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office acted swiftly to pause decisions on Syrian asylum claims whilst we assess the current situation.

We keep all country guidance relating to asylum claims under constant review so we can respond to emerging issues.

Chris Philp: [\[19721\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on returning Syrians (a) seeking and (b) granted asylum if that country becomes safe.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office acted swiftly to pause decisions on Syrian asylum claims whilst we assess the current situation. We keep all country guidance relating to asylum claims under constant review so we can respond to emerging issues.

■ Crime

Chris Philp: [\[19722\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish a breakdown of crimes committed by nationality in each of the last five years for which data is available.

Dame Diana Johnson:

As the Rt Hon Member is aware, the Home Office collects and publishes information on the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in England and Wales, on a quarterly basis, but Information on the nationality of offenders is not routinely collected and could only be collated and verified for the purposes of answering this question at disproportion cost.

■ Crimes of Violence: Women

Rupert Lowe: [\[18744\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of an independent review into the impact of crimes committed by illegal migrants on women and girls.

Dame Angela Eagle:

This Government has made the unprecedented commitment to halve violence against women and girls over the next decade, underpinned by a new VAWG strategy to be published next year.

As part of our approach, we will use every tool available to target perpetrators and address the root causes of the abuse and violence they commit, irrespective of their nationality or immigration status.

■ Domestic Abuse: Finance

Marie Goldman: [\[18717\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to extend the flexible fund beyond February 2025.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government is committed to supporting victims of domestic abuse.

At the beginning of October, we launched a £1.96m investment into the Flexible Fund. The Flexible Fund, administered by Women's Aid Federation of England, can be accessed through over 470 specialist domestic abuse services.

Following the spending review announcements in October, the Home Office is now deciding how the total funding settlement is allocated across the Department to deliver the Government's priorities. Further announcements regarding funding, including on the Flexible Fund, will follow in due course.

■ Emergency Services: Finance

James McMurdock:

[\[18865\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of granting Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioners the authority to independently determine the level of council tax precept increases for police and fire services in their areas.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government is committed to keeping taxes on working people as low as possible.

Following consultation on the provisional local government settlement the final set of referendum principles will be put before the House of Commons for approval in the New Year.

It is for Police and Fire Authorities to decide at what level they set their council tax.

■ Essex County Fire and Rescue Service: Finance

James McMurdock:

[\[18863\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department is taking steps to address funding shortfalls faced by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service in the context of the redistribution of the (a) Funding Guarantee Scheme and (b) Services Grant.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Funding allocations for 2025/26 will be set out at the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2024.

The Government has guaranteed that no local authority will see a reduction in their Core Spending Power in 2025-26 after taking account of any increase in council tax levels by applying a funding floor. This will provide the protections required for authorities to sustain their services between years, whilst recognising that we must begin the process of redirecting as much funding as possible towards the services and places that need it most.

■ Essex Police: Finance

James McMurdock: [\[18859\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the proposed 2025/26 funding settlement for Essex Police in the context of (a) the full-year cost of the 2023/24 pay award and (b) pay increments associated with the Police Uplift Programme.

James McMurdock: [\[18860\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing the Police Uplift Programme ringfence clawback arrangement to prevent reduction of officer numbers in police forces (a) in Essex and (b) nationally.

James McMurdock: [\[18861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of funding to mitigate the impact of unfunded pay increments for officers hired under the Police Uplift Programme in Essex.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The 2025-26 provisional police funding settlement provides funding of up to £19.5 billion for the policing system in England and Wales. This is an overall increase of up to £1 billion when compared to the 2024-25 settlement, and equates to a 5.5% cash increase, and 3% real terms increase in funding.

Essex Police will receive up to £431.1 million in 2025-26, an increase of up to £24.9 million when compared to 2024-25.

Additional funding for police forces, including funding for pay awards, should be considered in totality – including both government grants and precept.

This Government is committed to maintaining officer numbers. The Police Officer Maintenance grant provides funding to forces that successfully maintain officer headcounts as set out in the Police Funding Settlement. Forces are ineligible to receive funding if they fail to achieve these targets.

Based on the last published Police Workforce Statistics total officer numbers across England and Wales, and in Essex police, met officer maintenance requirements.

■ Fire and Rescue Services: Labour Turnover

James McMurdock: [\[18864\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a South East allowance for firefighters to support retention in (a) Essex and (b) other areas.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Government has no role in either setting or agreeing firefighter pay or allowances.

The final Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25 has determined that overall fire and rescue authorities will receive around £2.87 billion this year to continue protecting our communities at the highest standard. Standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities will see an increase in core spending power of £95.4 million in 2024/25. This is an increase of 5.6 per cent in cash terms compared to 2023/24.

Essex Fire and Rescue Authority will have core spending power of £92.1 million in 2024/25. This is an increase of 5.7 per cent in cash terms compared to 2023/24.

Funding allocations for 2025/26 will be set out at the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in December 2024.

■ Foreign Influence Registration Scheme

Nick Timothy:

[\[18703\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when she plans to commence the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, and whether she plans to include China in the enhanced tier of that scheme.

Dan Jarvis:

The Government is working at pace to implement the scheme. All further announcements will be made in the normal way in due course.

■ Home Office: Art Works

Nick Timothy:

[\[18702\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 18 October 2024 to Question 8515 on Home Office: Art Works and Cultural Heritage, which (a) portraits and (b) other works of art from the (i) Government Art Collection and (ii) her Department's collection are on display in her Department; what the reference numbers are of each; and which works have been (A) added and (B) removed since the general election.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Home Office does not hold any central record of the requested information, and could only collate it at disproportionate cost.

■ Home Office: Equality

Nick Timothy:

[\[18704\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many non-professional diversity and inclusion (a) advocates, (b) champions and (c) advisers work in each business area within her Department.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This information is not held centrally and could only be collated at disproportionate cost.

Nick Timothy:

[\[18705\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish her Department's equality training documentation on Windrush.

Seema Malhotra:

The documentation in question is due to be published shortly in response to a Freedom of Information request, and I will ensure that a copy is placed in the House of Commons Library.

Nick Timothy:

[\[18706\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many full-time equivalent staff support central staff diversity networks in her Department.

Dame Diana Johnson:

I refer the Hon Gentleman to the answer provided by Lord Hanson to question HL1115 on 30 September 2024.

■ Home Office: Recruitment and Unpaid Work

Rupert Lowe:

[\[18742\]](#)

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

Dame Diana Johnson:

Home Office recruitment policy and practice is conducted in accordance with UK law, including the Equality Act 2010, as well as the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles and the Civil Service Nationality rules (available on GOV.UK).

Non-Ministerial departments and Executive Agencies are responsible for managing their own recruitment processes and ensuring they are also compliant with UK law.

■ Lincolnshire Police: Finance

Sir John Hayes:

[\[18493\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of funding for Lincolnshire police force.

Dame Diana Johnson:

This Government is committed to ensuring that the police have the resources they need to tackle crime effectively.

Lincolnshire Police's funding will be up to £173.2m in 2025-26, an increase of up to £9 million when compared to the 2024-25 police settlement.

The Home Secretary announced over half a billion for 2025-26 more funding for policing and confirmed that police forces will be fully compensated for the changes to employer National Insurance contributions.

■ Migrants: Finance

Kate Osamor:

[\[18586\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of families that have no recourse to public funds.

Seema Malhotra:

The availability of data in respect of the number of families that have No Recourse to Public Funds condition is currently limited, while the Home Office transitions its casework operations to a new management information system until the transition process is complete.

Once fully migrated to the new system, it will be possible to explore what further information on NRPF can be produced.

■ National Crime Agency: Staff

Phil Brickell:

[\[19121\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what headcount cap has she set for the National Crime Agency for financial year (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26.

Dan Jarvis:

The Home Secretary has not set headcount caps for the National Crime Agency.

■ Police: Essex

Dr Neil Hudson:

[\[19814\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to support the (a) recruitment and (b) retention of police officers in (i) Epping Forest constituency and (ii) Essex.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The retention of police officers is an important element of managing the police workforce. Voluntary resignation rates in England and Wales, at 3.4%, are low compared to other sectors.

It is important that police forces use effective strategies to manage the retention and progression of existing officers, as well as continuing to recruit new officers.

The Police Officer Maintenance grant provides funding to forces that successfully maintain officer headcounts as set out in the 2024/25 Police Funding Settlement.

Funding arrangements for the coming year have been set out as part of the 2025-26 provisional police funding settlement.

■ Police: Mobile Phones

Claire Young:

[\[19790\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will take steps to improve the effectiveness of data collection from mobile phones by the police in relation to crime.

Dame Diana Johnson:

The Digital Forensics Programme (DFP) scopes, develops and delivers innovative solutions to ensure policing can use high quality technology to tackle the rising volumes of digital forensics work, including forensic examinations of mobile phones, more efficiently.

We have allocated up to £13m to forensics in 2024/25 to help forces access, develop, and deliver more integrated, sustainable and efficient forensic services, improve various aspects of the investigatory process, speed up the time it takes the police to analyse data, including data from mobile phones, and enhance the victim experience.

The Government intends to consult on a new National Centre of Policing to bring together crucial support services, including forensics, that local police forces can draw upon, to raise standards, and improve efficiency.

Refugees: Employment and Training**Tim Farron:**[\[18515\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what tailored support she plans to provide to refugees to access (a) training and (b) employment after the closure of the Refugee Employment Programme in June 2025.

Seema Malhotra:

The Refugee Employability Programme (REP) was designed as a time-bound programme. It will come to a natural end in June 2025 in line with the contract delivery timelines.

All refugees will continue to have access to mainstream services to support their transition into work, including employment support from DWP work coaches.

Newly granted refugees are also able to access support through Migrant Help, which includes advice on how to access the labour market.

Research and Scientists: Visas**Chi Onwurah:**[\[19692\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on visas for (a) scientists and (b) researchers.

Seema Malhotra:

The Government is committed to ensuring scientists and researchers have access to visas that work for them. The United Kingdom has a strong immigration offer for scientists and researchers, including the Skilled Worker and Global Talent routes, and we continually keep our policies under review.

The Home Office and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology are in regular communication on a range of issues.

■ UK Border Force: Seasonal Workers

Rebecca Paul: [\[18824\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether Border Force plans to continue using its seasonal workforce beyond 31 January 2025.

Seema Malhotra:

Border Force will continue to secure the border through effective planning and deployment of its resources, which after 31 January 2025 will not include utilisation of the seasonal workforce.

■ Undocumented Migrants: English Channel

Mr Gregory Campbell: [\[19637\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people who arrived in the UK by small boats since 5 July 2024 are (a) male and (b) female.

Dame Angela Eagle:

The Home Office publishes quarterly statistics on detected irregular arrivals to the UK in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Quarterly data on detected irregular arrivals by sex and method of entry, including small boat arrivals, is published in table Irr_D01 of the '[Irregular migration to the UK detailed datasets](#)'. The latest data is up to the end of September 2024, with data up to December 2024 to be published on 27 February 2025.

■ Undocumented Workers: Delivery Services

Rupert Lowe: [\[18754\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of undertaking a review of the employment of illegal immigrants in the food delivery industry.

Dame Angela Eagle:

I refer the Honourable Member to the Answer I gave on 4 December to Question UIN 16906.

■ Visas: Families

Chris Philp: [\[19723\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will increase the salary threshold for family visas.

Seema Malhotra:

On 10th September the Home Secretary commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review the financial requirements in the Family Immigration Rules. Conducting a review of the financial requirements across the family routes will ensure we have a clear and consistent system.

The MAC ran a call for evidence from 16 September 2024 to 11 December 2024 which will inform their report, and any further changes to the financial requirements across the Family routes will be informed by their recommendations.

■ Wholesale Trade: Crimes of Violence

Mrs Sharon Hodgson: [\[18513\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to include provisions on the protection of wholesale workers in the Crime and Policing Bill.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Shop theft continues to increase at an unacceptable level, up 29% on year up to June 2024, with more and more offenders using violence and abuse against shopworkers to do this. We won't stand for this.

Everybody has a right to feel safe on the job and this government is committed to taking retail crime seriously.

As part of the Government's Safer Streets Mission, we will introduce a new specific offence for assaults on shopworkers to protect them from violence and abuse.

The scope of this new offence will be confirmed when legislation is brought forward.

Paul Davies: [\[18829\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of trends in the levels of wholesale crime.

Paul Davies: [\[18830\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to introduce specific protections for wholesale workers.

Paul Davies: [\[18831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to help protect wholesale workers from crime.

Dame Diana Johnson:

Shop theft continues to increase at an unacceptable level with more and more offenders using violence and abuse against shopworkers to do this. Everybody has a right to feel safe on the job and this Government is committed to taking retail crime seriously.

Partnership working to tackle retail crime is essential. I am committed to chairing the Retail Crime Forum, which the Federation of Wholesale Distributors are a member of, to ensure we understand the needs of all retailers and to promote collaboration between the retail sector, security providers and law enforcement.

This Government will introduce a new specific offence for assaults on shopworkers to protect them from violence and abuse. The scope of this new offence will be confirmed when legislation is brought forward.

The Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey 2023, published in May 2024, showed that theft by customer was the most prevalent type of theft experienced in the retail and wholesale sector, experienced by 26% of premises. The wholesale and retail sector experienced a higher prevalence of victimisation (41%) compared with most other commercial sectors.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Affordable Housing

Andrew Cooper:

[\[19870\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help increase the supply of affordable housing in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England.

Matthew Pennycook:

I refer my hon Friend to the answer I gave to Question UIN [11383](#) on 31 October 2024.

■ Council Tax: Birmingham

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[18564\]](#)

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 on 14 November 2024, Official Report, columns 907-914, what estimate her Department has made of the average Birmingham City Council Council Tax rate in 2025-26, expressed as (a) a Band D amount in pounds and (b) the percentage difference from 2024-25, in the context of her Department's local government core spending power estimate of £68,459m for that year and the consequential assumptions on council tax referendum principles for 2025-26.

Jim McMahon:

Council tax levels are decided by each council following the local government finance settlement. As such the government cannot comment on individual council tax levels or band D rates. The Local Government Finance Policy Statement published on 28 November sets out proposed council tax referendum principles for 2025 to 2026 of up to 3% and an adult social care precept of 2% for all local authorities responsible for adult social care services. This is in line with the previous government's policy for 2024-25, and together with central government grant and locally-retained business rates provides a real-terms increase in core spending power of around 3.2% next year. The full statement can be found at: [Local government finance policy statement 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#).

■ Dedicated Schools Grant

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[18568\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she plans to extend the statutory override for the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Jim McMahon:

We will work with the sector when considering how we can help councils manage the impacts of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits on their finances.

This government recognises the vital work that local councils do for their communities, and we stand ready to speak to any council that is experiencing financial difficulties.

We will set out the government's plans for the future of the Statutory Override at the provisional Settlement in December.

■ Empty Property: Leisure and Retail Trade

Josh Babarinde: [\[18727\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to prevent large vacant (a) retail and (b) leisure units in town centres from remaining empty.

Alex Norris:

The government is fully committed to tackling the issue of persistent vacancy in town centres and rejuvenating our high streets. High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) came into effect on 2 December 2024 and are a new permissive power for local authorities in England to auction the lease of commercial high street property (including retail and leisure units) that has been vacant for longer than 12 months in a 24-month period.

Furthermore, through the English Devolution Bill, we will introduce a strong new 'right to buy' for valued community assets. This measure will empower local communities to reclaim and revitalise assets that are important to them such as empty shops, pubs, and community spaces, helping to improve our high streets and eliminate the blight of vacant premises.

■ Freehold: Property Management Companies

Ben Maguire: [\[18082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a system for dispute resolution available to freeholders paying estate management fees.

Matthew Pennycook:

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 includes measures that extend access to redress schemes to freehold estate homeowners. It does this by requiring estate management companies who manage communal areas to join a redress scheme.

Bringing the provisions of the Act into force will require an extensive programme of secondary legislation.

As set out in the Written Ministerial Statement I made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)), the government will consult on implementing the Act's new consumer protection provisions next year and to bring these measures into force as quickly as possible thereafter.

■ Homelessness

Andrew Cooper:

[\[19869\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support councils in (a) Mid Cheshire constituency, (b) Cheshire and (c) England to reduce homelessness.

James McMurdock:

[\[19913\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to tackle (a) homelessness (b) rough sleeping in (i) Essex (ii) the South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

Rushanara Ali:

Homelessness levels are far too high. This government recognises the devastating impact this can have on those affected.

We must address this and deliver long term solutions. The Government is looking at these issues carefully and will develop a new cross government strategy, working with mayors and councils across the country to get us back on track to ending homelessness once and for all. This includes a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, bringing together ministers from across government.

The Government is also tackling the root causes of homelessness, including the delivery of the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation and building 1.5 million new homes over the next parliament.

There is £1.2 billion committed through the Homelessness Prevention Grant from 2022 to 2025, of which Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester received a combined total of £6,442,462.48. Basildon received £3,743,552.85 and Thurrock £3,340,472.94. And, 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.

The budget committed nearly £1 billion total spend on homelessness services in 2025/26 and is the first step to getting us back on track to ending homelessness. We expect to publish allocations for funding for 2025/26 alongside the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

■ Homelessness: Departmental Coordination

Paula Barker: [\[19071\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many times officials from her Department have met with homelessness sector stakeholders since July 2024.

Paula Barker: [\[19072\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she plans to take to consult the homelessness sector on the work of the development of a cross-departmental strategy for ending homelessness.

Paula Barker: [\[19073\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what (a) formal role and (b) ongoing involvement she will have in the (i) formulation and (ii) implementation of a cross-departmental strategy for ending homelessness.

Rushanara Ali:

The Deputy Prime Minister is leading cross-government work to deliver the long-term solutions we need to get us back on track to ending all forms of homelessness. This includes chairing a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, bringing together ministers from across government to develop a long-term strategy.

We have also established an Expert Group to bring together representatives from across the homelessness and rough sleeping sector, local and combined authorities and wider experts to help Government understand what is working well nationally and locally and where improvements are needed.

We will engage across the sector at ministerial and official level, as well as with those with lived experience through a lived experience forum to ensure their voices are reflected in the homelessness strategy.

■ Housing First: Pilot Schemes

Neil Duncan-Jordan: [\[18847\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of Housing First pilot schemes; and whether she plans to expand those schemes.

Rushanara Ali:

I refer my Hon Friend to the answer given to Question UIN [15811](#) on 3 December 2024.

■ Housing: Fire Prevention

Kevin McKenna: [\[18825\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to improve fire safety in residential buildings; and what

support she has made available for (a) leaseholders and (b) building owners that do not qualify for the Cladding Safety Scheme.

Alex Norris:

The new building safety regime puts in place more stringent oversight for the safety of high-rise residential buildings, with clearer accountability backed by stronger enforcement and sanctions to deter and rectify non-compliance.

The new regulatory requirements also require all people responsible for higher-risk buildings to capture and report certain fire and structural safety issues (mandatory safety occurrences) to the Building Safety Regulator.

There is a pathway to fixing unsafe cladding in all 11 metres+ residential buildings in England through developer, social housing provider and government funded remediation programmes.

Any contribution required from [qualifying leaseholders](#) for non-cladding defects and interim measures is firmly capped and spread over 10 years, with costs already paid out since 28 June 2017 counting towards the cap. If remediation costs exceed the cap, building owners must make up the difference. This means that, for the majority of qualifying leaseholders, the maximum amount that can be charged for non-cladding remediation and interim measures is £15,000 in Greater London (or £10,000 elsewhere in England).

All leaseholders, including those who hold a non-qualifying lease, benefit from qualifying lease status for their principal residence on 14 February 2022 if it is in a [relevant building](#) above 11 metres or five storeys. Non-qualifying leaseholders cannot be required to pay more than they would have done in the absence of the leaseholder protections, i.e., they cannot be required to pay for others' share of remediation costs.

The Building Safety Act enables provides a route for building owners to pursue remediation contribution orders against developers and contractors – and their associated companies – for funds they have spent or will spend remediating their buildings for relevant defects.

■ **Infrastructure: Rural Areas**

Stuart Anderson:

[\[18632\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to maximise the use of developer's contributions to improve community infrastructure in rural areas.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government is also committed to strengthening the existing system of developer contributions to ensure new developments provide necessary affordable homes and infrastructure, including in rural areas. Further details will be set out in due course.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December also supports the increased provision and modernisation of various types of public infrastructure, including in rural areas.

■ Land Registry: Equality**Sir John Hayes:**[\[18488\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by HM Land Registry.

Alex Norris:

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) matters are embedded within the work of the wider HR Strategy and Policy Team (which is 1.5 FTE in total) within HM Land Registry .

■ Leasehold: Ground Rent**Barry Gardiner:**[\[18874\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when she plans to publish the results of the consultation entitled Modern Leasehold: Restricting Ground Rent for Existing Leases, which closed on 17 January 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

As outlined in the Written Ministerial Statement made on 21 November 2024 ([HCWS244](#)), the government remains firmly committed to its manifesto commitment to tackle unregulated and unaffordable ground rents, and we will deliver this in legislation. We will set out next steps in due course.

■ Local Government Finance: Disadvantaged**James McMurdock:**[\[18862\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will review the distribution criteria for the Recovery Grant to ensure access to that funding for (a) Essex and (b) other areas with pockets of severe deprivation.

Jim McMahon:

We have announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding in 2025/26 for local government to deliver core services and will provide a real-terms increase in total core spending power of around 3.2%. The Recovery Grant will be allocated to places where, weighted by population, deprivation outweighs council tax raising ability. The grant is intended to be highly targeted, meaning that not all authorities will receive an allocation. We understand this decision will feel hard for some local councils which fall outside the line, but this grant must be considered in the wider context.

The government will set out the provisional allocations at the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26 in the usual way towards the end of the calendar year. The government is clear that the Recovery Grant is not full reform and is committed to pursuing a comprehensive set of reforms for public services through a multi-year settlement from 2026-27.

■ Local Government Finance: Elections

Kevin Hollinrake:

[\[18369\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Written Statement of 28 November 2024 on Local Government Finance, HCWS265, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Government's programme of devolution and reorganisation on the scheduling of elections in May 2025.

Jim McMahon:

The English Devolution White Paper announces a widening and deepening of devolution, and a programme of local government reorganisation. We have committed to work closely with local leaders to explore what support they might need to develop robust proposals for that reorganisation and to implement new structures, including taking decisions to postpone local elections where this will help.

■ Local Government Services: Rural Areas

Vikki Slade:

[\[19793\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she is taking steps to ensure that local authorities in rural areas receive higher levels of funding in the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025-26, in the context of her Department's plans to repurpose funding allocated for the Rural Services Delivery Grant.

Jim McMahon:

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

The Rural Services Delivery Grant does not properly account for need and a large number of predominantly rural councils receive nothing from it – that's clearly not right and a sign we need to allocate funding more effectively. The government is keen to hear from councils about how best to consider the impact of rurality on the costs of service delivery, and demand, as part of our longer term consultations on local authority funding reform.

■ Local Government: Worcestershire

Bradley Thomas:

[\[19529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions her Department has had with Worcestershire County Council on (a) local government reorganisation and (b) devolution.

Jim McMahon:

On Monday, this Government published a landmark English Devolution White Paper, setting out an ambitious plan for extending the benefits of devolution to more of England and unleashing further powers from Whitehall back into local communities

that know their areas best. The White Paper sets out a new Devolution Priority Programme which is available to all places, including Worcestershire, who are ready to come together under sensible geographies and are ready to deliver on the Governments ambitions around mayoral devolution. This programme will aim to deliver institutions and have Mayors elected in the May 2026 elections. The Government will announce the places included in the Devolution Priority Programme in due course.

Alongside this, Government will shortly invite unitary proposals from all councils in two-tier areas, including Worcestershire. Any new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

Government looks forward to hearing from Worcestershire on English Devolution and Local Government Reform.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Buildings

Mary Glendon: [\[19288\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to her oral Answer to the Question from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend of 2 December 2024, Official Report, column 11, if she will publish the initial equality impact assessment.

Mary Glendon: [\[19289\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what account her Department took of the public sector equality duty in taking the decision to close six offices across its estate.

Alex Norris:

The Department prepared an initial equality impact assessment in advance of the announcement of the location strategy, in line with our responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Department is now consulting trade unions and staff. The consultation is considering the impact on the individuals affected by the decision to close six of our offices, with a view to informing the measures to mitigate those impacts and enable those individuals to continue to perform their roles effectively.

The equality impact assessment is being updated throughout that consultation process, to include the feedback from staff, including those with protected characteristics. The latest version has been shared with the trade unions.

The final version will be published following completion of that consultation process. My officials have met with trade union representatives on a regular basis and will continue to meet with them throughout the consultation and implementation process.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Civil Servants

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[18566\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, pursuant to the Answer of 16 October 2024 to Question 6111 and 6401 on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Civil Servants, how many people appointed under exception one worked in their previous role for (a) the Labour Party, (b) Labour Together and (c) a Labour Parliamentarian.

Alex Norris:

It is the longstanding convention of government under successive administrations that we do not comment on matters relating to individual staff.

As part of our recruitment and onboarding process, we ask all candidates to disclose any perceived, actual or potential conflicts of interest [in line with Cabinet Office guidance](#).

All disclosures made by candidates are explored and discussed with the hiring manager.

■ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Training

Kevin Hollinrake: [\[18872\]](#)

[SUGGESTED RE-DRAFT] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many away days her Department has held for senior officials since the 30 May 2024.

Alex Norris:

The department uses a range of forums and approaches to bring senior leadership teams together to plan work to deliver ministerial priorities and ensure we are developing necessary leadership capability. These are dependent on team need and priorities and are not directed centrally but we are confident our arrangements are proportionate.

■ Planning: Local Government

Mr Andrew Snowden: [\[19890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential effect of removing the role of elected councillors from certain planning processes under the new National Planning Policy Framework on trust in local democratic services.

Matthew Pennycook:

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It makes no reference whatsoever to the role of elected councillors.

In the King's Speech, we set out our intention to use the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill to improve local planning decision making by modernising planning committees.

The government believes that planning committees have an integral role in providing local democratic oversight of planning decisions. However, in exercising that democratic oversight, it is vital that planning committees operate as effectively as possible, focusing on those applications which require member input and not revisiting the same decisions.

Our recently published planning reform working paper on planning committees, which can be found on gov.uk [here](#), invites views on models for a national scheme of delegation, the creation of smaller targeted planning committees specifically for strategic development, and the introduction of a mandatory requirement for training for planning committee members.

Mr Andrew Snowden:

[19892]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps the Government will take with respect to councils who do not meet the targets set out in the National Policy Planning Framework, announced on 12 December 2024.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government expects local planning authorities to explore and exhaust all options to deliver the homes their communities need.

An authority's ability to meet their housing need through plan-making will be tested at a public examination, which will assess whether there are any justified reasons for not being able to meet a target in full.

There are two tests of whether authorities are meeting housing need: the Housing Delivery Test, which measures authorities' delivery record over the previous three years, and the 'five-year housing land supply' policy, which tests whether authorities have allocated sufficient land to provide a housing pipeline.

Where authorities fail against these tests, 'the presumption' in favour of sustainable development kicks in. The government are clear that 'the presumption' cannot be a gateway to poor quality housing, and through the revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December we have added new safeguards to ensure this is the case.

■ Planning: Reform

Shivani Raja:

[18714]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that planning reforms balance new housing development with the protection of (a) green spaces and (b) local heritage in (i) Leicester and (ii) England.

Matthew Pennycook:

The government published the revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#) on 12 December. The Framework reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring the historic environment, both at a local and national level, and local green space are appropriately protected.

■ Planning: Rural Areas**Mr Andrew Snowden:**[\[19894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure the reforms set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, published on 12 December 2024, safeguard the beauty and character of (a) Fylde constituency and (b) other rural areas.

Matthew Pennycook:

The revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 12 December retains strong safeguards in relation to the beauty and character of all parts of the countryside.

■ Recruitment: Location**Kevin Hollinrake:**[\[18565\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether her Department has a policy on location-neutral recruitment.

Alex Norris:

MHCLG adheres to the Civil Service Recruitment Principles for all advertised recruitment campaigns, ensuring roles are offered on a fair, open and merit basis. Alternative working patterns and flexible working arrangements can be discussed with successful candidates on a case-by-case basis. Some roles are offered in specific and limited locations where they are related to a particular place or region, whilst other roles are offered in a broader range of locations.

■ Regional Planning and Development: Higher Education**Mike Reader:**[\[18827\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether she has had made an assessment of the potential role of universities (a) within and (b) outside mayoral combined authorities in local growth programmes.

Jim McMahon:

Local leadership is at the heart of our mission to deliver growth. Universities have an important role in driving growth across the country, working in partnership with other local stakeholders to deliver improved outcomes for their communities. In mayoral combined authorities and elsewhere in the UK, Investment Zones are leveraging the important role that universities and research institutions play, ensuring they collaborate with industry to promote growth. Local Growth Plans will also play an important role in delivering growth – locally owned and long-term strategic plans that

will engage a range of stakeholders, including universities, to build on each region's unique strengths and opportunities.

■ Right to Buy Scheme

Kevin Hollinrake:

[18870]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a formal consultation on reductions to Right to Buy discounts.

Matthew Pennycook:

In line with our manifesto commitment, the government undertook a review of the increased Right to Buy discounts introduced in 2012. The review was conducted internally within government but was informed by external analysis and reports, as well as engagement with local authorities, social housing tenants, and other stakeholders.

This engagement informed the conclusions of the review, which was to reduce maximum cash discounts to pre-2012 levels of between £16,000 and £38,000. More information about the review can be found on gov.uk [here](#) and details of the stakeholder engagement undertaken to inform it is set out within Annex B to the review document.

The reduced discounts will remain in place until further notice, but will be kept under review to ensure that we strike the right balance between protecting social housing stock and enabling tenants to access home ownership.

On 20 November, the government published a consultation on wider reforms to the Right to Buy scheme, including percentage discounts. This can be found on gov.uk [here](#).

■ Right to Buy Scheme: Foreign Nationals

Rupert Lowe:

[18264]

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 make an estimate of the number of people from (a) EEA countries and (b) other nationalities who have purchased social housing through right-to-buy schemes since 2007.

Matthew Pennycook:

Detailed information relating to sales of social housing, including Right to Buy, is collected on a voluntary basis by local authorities.

The Department does not hold robust data on the nationality of those who have purchased social homes through Right to Buy.

■ Small Businesses: Sutton and Cheam

Luke Taylor:

[19491]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps her Department is taking to support small and medium sized high street businesses with (a) rising rents, (b) business rates and (c) rises in employer National Insurance contributions in Sutton and Cheam constituency.

Jim McMahon:

The Government is fully committed to rejuvenating our high streets. We want to support the businesses and communities that make our town centres successful. To deliver our manifesto pledge on business rates, we intend to introduce permanently tax rates for high street retail, hospitality, and leisure properties, with rateable values below £500,000, from 2026-27. Ahead of these changes being made, we have extended the retail, hospitality and leisure rate relief for one year, at 40 per cent up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business, and frozen the small business multiplier.

The Government has protected the smallest businesses and charities from the impact of the increase to Employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs) by increasing the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500. This 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.

■ Social Services: Croydon East

Natasha Irons:

[18734]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, What proportion of the (a) Children's Social Care Prevention Grant and (b) Children and Families Grant will be allocated to Croydon East constituency.

Jim McMahon:

The government will bring forward its proposals for the Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26 in the usual way towards the end of the calendar year. This will set out provisional allocations for local authorities and invite views via a formal consultation.

■ Temporary Accommodation: Children

Andy McDonald:

[18548]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of local government (a) processes and (b) resources for identifying suitable accommodation for homeless people in the context of the (i) interim duty to accommodate and (ii) main housing duty in each year since 2010.

Andy McDonald: [\[18549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of local government capacity to provide suitable accommodation for homeless people within the same local authority boundaries.

Andy McDonald: [\[18550\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many (a) in-area and (b) out-of-area awards for housing accommodation for homeless people were made under local authorities' (i) interim duty to accommodate and (ii) main housing duty by each local authority in the North East in each year since 2010.

Andy McDonald: [\[18551\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many children were housed in unsuitable temporary accommodation in each local authority in the North East in each year since 2010.

Andy McDonald: [\[18552\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking help support local authorities to access suitable accommodation for homeless people to meet their (a) interim duty to accommodate and (b) main housing duty.

Mike Amesbury: [\[18604\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many families living in temporary accommodation include children aged under two.

Mike Amesbury: [\[18605\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to help ensure temporary accommodation is suitable for children.

Mike Amesbury: [\[18606\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how many families with children under the age of two live in temporary accommodation that does not include a cot.

Mike Amesbury: [\[18607\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if she will take steps to ensure that (a) a cot and (b) relevant safer sleep advice is provided for children under two in temporary accommodation.

Rushanara Ali:

Homelessness levels are far too high. This Government recognises the devastating impact this can have on those affected, especially children.

We must address this and deliver long term solutions. The Government is looking at these issues carefully and will develop a new cross government strategy, working with mayors and councils across the country to get us back on track to ending

homelessness once and for all. This includes a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, bringing together ministers from across government.

The Homelessness Reduction Act places duties on local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to try to prevent and relieve a person's homelessness. If homelessness cannot be prevented or relieved, the local authority may owe the applicant a duty to provide them with temporary accommodation until settled accommodation is secured.

All temporary accommodation must be safe and suitable. The Homelessness Code of Guidance is clear that temporary accommodation should not be considered suitable for a family with children under two if there is not enough space for a cot and that housing authorities should support families to secure a cot where needed. In addition, the legislation and guidance set out that in the first instance, local authorities should try to place individuals within their own area, and when this is not possible, they should place the household as near as possible to the original local authority.

On 11 November 2024 the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to all local authority Chief Executives in England about out-of-area accommodation placements. This letter referred to section 208 of the Housing Act 1996 and reminded local authorities that they are required by law to notify the receiving local authority of any out-of-area placement and that this should be happening in every case. The placing authority should also seek to retain established links with schools, doctors, social workers and other key services and support wherever possible.

We must build more homes in the areas where they are needed so we can reduce the need for out of area placements, which is why we will deliver the biggest increase to social and affordable housing in a generation.

Local authorities are required to report homelessness data each quarter, including information on children in TA and out-of-area placements. The most recent figures for Q2 2024 can be accessed below using tab TA1:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-april-to-june-2024/statutory-homelessness-in-england-april-to-june-2024>.

JUSTICE

■ Horizon IT System: Convictions

Alison Griffiths:

[19972]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many letters her Department has sent informing postmasters and former postmasters that their conviction has been rescinded under the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024.

Sarah Sackman:

I refer the honourable Member to the GOV.UK page where the Ministry of Justice publishes monthly management information on the progress of the Post Office

Convictions casework team. This page can be found at: [Post Office \(Horizon System\) Offences Act 2024: Quashed convictions management information - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/post-office-horizon-system-offences-act-2024-quashed-convictions-management-information).

As of the 29 November, the Department had assessed 875 individual cases and had written to 526 individuals or their appropriate contacts to inform them that they had one or more convictions quashed by the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Act 2024. A further update will be published in mid-January.

I would actively encourage anyone who believes they have a conviction in scope of the legislation and has not heard from my department to register for the Horizon Convictions Redress Scheme on GOV.UK so their case can be considered.

■ Young Offender Institutions: Education

Patrick Spencer: [\[18826\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department plans to review the education provided to children in young offender institutions.

Sir Nicholas Dakin:

Following the Education Thematic Review recently published by Ofsted and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, education delivery in young offender institutions is under review.

The Youth Custody Service (YCS) is committed to promoting the development of each child in its care by delivering a range of learning and enrichment activities that are individualised, responsive to children's needs, and aligned with trauma-informed care. This is an integrated whole-systems approach involving various professionals.

Education providers are working alongside subject-matter experts (Heads of Education, Skills and Work) and Governors to develop broad and balanced curriculums that facilitate the holistic development of all children in the YCS's care. This includes access to vocational training and creative learning.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ Consumer Goods: UK Trade with EU

Alex Easton: [\[19184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the EU General Product Safety Regulations on (a) businesses and (b) consumers in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) Great Britain; and what steps he is taking to mitigate that potential impact.

Hilary Benn:

The updated General Product Safety Regulations largely formalises how businesses are already operating in the UK and the measures are therefore likely to have in practice a limited impact overall. Where businesses need to make changes, many will

be adapting anyway to be compliant with the new Regulation to continue trading with the EU.

In addition to the [guidance](#) published on 3 December, the Government is continuing to engage with businesses to ensure the smooth flow of goods across the internal market.

■ **European Union (Withdrawal Arrangements) Bill**

Alex Easton: [\[18801\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will published the legal advice he received on the European Union (Withdrawal Arrangements) Bill.

Hilary Benn:

The Government set out its position on the Bill during its Second Reading on 6 December 2024. Legal advice provided to the Government is privileged.

■ **Northern Ireland Executive: Public Appointments**

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[18735\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of reforming the process for appointing the (a) First Minister and (b) Deputy First Minister.

Hilary Benn:

I meet regularly with the Northern Ireland parties to discuss a range of issues, including the UK Government's commitment to ensuring the long-term stability of Northern Ireland institutions.

■ **Politics and Government: Northern Ireland**

Sorcha Eastwood: [\[18736\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether he plans to have discussions with political parties on the future of Northern Ireland's political institutions.

Hilary Benn:

I meet regularly with the Northern Ireland parties to discuss a range of issues, including the UK Government's commitment to ensuring the long-term stability of Northern Ireland institutions.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ **Arthritis: Research**

Peter Fortune: [\[18771\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into rheumatoid arthritis research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18772\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into osteoarthritis arthritis research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18773\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into psoriatic arthritis research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18774\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into systemic lupus erythematosus research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18775\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into joint replacement research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18776\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into crystal arthropathy research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18777\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into osteoporosis research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18778\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government investment into compression fracture research there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that investment.

Peter Fortune: [\[18779\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government investment into multiple myeloma there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that investment.

Peter Fortune: [\[18780\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government investment into vitamin D deficiency disease research there was in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that investment.

Peter Fortune: [\[18781\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into osteomalacia research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18782\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into fibromyalgia research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into ankylosing spondylitis research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18784\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into stills disease research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18785\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into lyme disease research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Peter Fortune: [\[18786\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much Government funding there was into reactive arthritis research in 2023-24; and which public bodies provided that funding.

Feryal Clark:

DSIT funds medical research through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Department of Health and Social Care funds research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

UKRI's Medical Research Council (MRC) supports the best scientific research to improve human health, with work ranging from molecular level science to public health medicine. MRC plays a key role in funding underpinning research which may not be attributable to a specific disease but will benefit medical research more generally. As part of this, UKRI funds research on immunology which is relevant to all of these diseases and will not be categorised per disease.

Details of UKRI and NIHR funding on specific areas is provided in the table below:

	UKRI FUNDING COMMITTED IN 2023 AND 2024 TO DATE	NIHR FUNDING IN FY 2023/24
rheumatoid arthritis	The total commitment for research concerning rheumatoid arthritis from UKRI was £7,640,156 for 10 awards (2 awards from Innovate UK; 1 award from EPSRC; 7 awards from MRC with a value of £6,260,577).	NIHR allocated £3,063,380 for research concerning rheumatoid arthritis in F/Y 2023-24.
osteoarthritis	The total commitment from for research concerning osteoarthritis from UKRI was £8,136,483 for 15 awards (6 awards from Innovate UK; 1 award from BBSRC; 2 awards from EPSRC; 1 award from ESRC; 3 awards from MRC with a value of £1,503,711; 2 awards from NC3Rs).	NIHR allocated £2,388,275 for research concerning osteoarthritis in F/Y 2023-24.
psoriatic arthritis	The total commitment for research concerning psoriatic arthritis from UKRI was £500,965 for 1 award (Innovate UK).	NIHR allocated £154,496 for research concerning psoriatic arthritis in F/Y 2023-24.
systemic lupus erythematosus	The total commitment for research concerning systemic lupus erythematosus from UKRI was £3,673,302 for 3 awards (1 award from Innovate UK; 1 award from EPSRC; 1 award from MRC with a value of £1,636,608)	The NIHR spent £155,574 on systemic lupus erythematosus research in F/Y 2023-24.
joint replacement	The total commitment for research concerning joint replacement from UKRI was £4,736,426 for 5 awards (3 awards from Innovate UK; 2 awards from EPSRC).	The NIHR spent £4,208,220 on joint replacement research in F/Y 2023-24.

	UKRI FUNDING COMMITTED IN 2023 AND 2024 TO DATE	NIHR FUNDING IN FY 2023/24
crystal arthropathy	UKRI did not commit any funding specifically for crystal arthropathy research in 2023 and 2024 to date.	The NIHR spent £2,061,659 on crystal arthropathy research in F/Y 2023-24.
osteoporosis	The total commitment from for research concerning osteoporosis from UKRI was £2,363,661 for 6 awards (4 awards from Innovate UK; 1 award from BBSRC; 1 award from ESRC).	NIHR allocated £379,475 for research concerning osteoporosis in F/Y.
compression fracture	UKRI did not commit any funding specifically for compression fracture research in 2023 and 2024 to date.	NIHR has not funded any research concerning compression fracture during F/Y 2023-24.
multiple myeloma	UKRI did not commit any funding specifically for multiple myeloma research in 2023 and 2024 to date	NIHR allocated £416,500 for research concerning multiple myeloma in F/Y 2023-24.
vitamin D deficiency disease	The total commitment for research concerning vitamin D deficiency disease from UKRI was £261,394 for 2 awards (Innovate UK).	NIHR has not allocated funds concerning Vitamin D deficiency disease research during F/Y 2023-24.
osteomalacia	UKRI did not commit any funding specifically for osteomalacia research in 2023 and 2024 to date.	NIHR has not allocated any funds concerning osteomalacia disease research during F/Y 2023-24
Fibromyalgia	UKRI did not commit any funding specifically for fibromyalgia research in 2023 and 2024 to date.	NIHR has not allocated any funds concerning fibromyalgia disease during F/Y 2023-24.
ankylosing spondylitis	UKRI did not commit any research specifically for ankylosing spondylitis research in 2023 and 2024 to date.	NIHR allocated £199,500 for research concerning ankylosing spondylitis in F/Y 2023-24.

	UKRI FUNDING COMMITTED IN 2023 AND 2024 TO DATE	NIHR FUNDING IN FY 2023/24
stills disease	UKRI did not commit any research specifically for stills disease research in 2023 and 2024 to date.	NIHR has not funded any research concerning stills disease during F/Y 2023-24.
lyme disease	The total commitment for research concerning lyme disease from UKRI was £1,259,602 for 1 award (BBSRC).	NIHR has not funded any research concerning lyme disease during F/Y 2023-24
reactive arthritis	UKRI did not commit any funding specifically for reactive arthritis research in 2023 and 2024 to date.	The NIHR has not funded any research concerning reactive arthritis during F/Y 2023-24.

■ Geospatial Commission: Pilot Schemes

George Freeman:

[R] [\[18529\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans he has for the future of the Geospatial Commission's Earth observation data pilot.

Chris Bryant:

The Earth Observation data pilot came to an end in 31 March 2024. Working with optical, thermal and SAR data from space satellites, the pilot demonstrated that increased use of this data could improve evidence-based analysis and enhance front-line delivery in the public sector to support the provision of digital government services for citizens. The work will inform decisions on the procurement, accessibility and use of earth observation across the public sector.

George Freeman:

[R] [\[18530\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans he has for future (a) funding of and (b) data sharing by the Earth observation data hub.

Chris Bryant:

The Earth Observation (EO) data hub project is a pathfinder project which will assess whether a new infrastructure for EO data could deliver better access to and exploitation of EO data by federating EO data assets from public and commercial centres in a quality-assured environment and by creating a platform for analysis and value add.

The project was funded through the Earth observation investment package until 31st March 2025.

Decisions on any longer-term funding for EO data infrastructure will be made in due course.

■ Health: Research

Chi Onwurah:

[19686]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to his Department's press release of 12 December 2024 entitled £100 million public-private health research boost from which budget is the public sector funding coming; and what proportion is public investment.

Feryal Clark:

The Voluntary Scheme for Branded Medicines Pricing, Access, and Growth (VPAG) Investment Programme is enabled by circa £400m of funding from scheme members over 5 years.

Approximately 75% of total Investment Programme funding will boost commercial clinical trials across the UK, including through the new Commercial Research Delivery Centres (CRDCs).

The CRDCs are a public-private investment which include funding from the VPAG Investment Programme and £71m additional funding in England from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

■ Methane: Remote Sensing

George Freeman:

[R] [18531]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans he has for the UK Space Agency's methane monitoring programme.

George Freeman:

[R] [18532]

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans he has as chair of the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites to support development of methane emissions measurement best practices.

Chris Bryant:

The UK Space Agency is increasing engagement with private, academic and public sectors to improve methane monitoring and address gaps.

As Chair of the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites, we will promote a new framework, developed by the National Physical Laboratory and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, to validate data providers' products to ensure reliability. It will provide new best practice for measuring from space facility-scale methane emissions.

The UK Space Agency will promote the framework internationally, collaborating with other nations and industry to ensure these best practices are recognised as an approved measurement methodology within the Global Methane Pledge.

■ Solar Events: Research

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18648\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with ARIA on support for research into space weather since July 2024.

Chris Bryant:

Ministers have had no such discussions and ARIA does not currently have a programme focused on space weather.

As set out in ARIA's Framework Agreement, ARIA has maximum autonomy over its research and project choice. Decisions on the programme portfolio are set by ARIA, and allocation of funding to research projects is decided by those with relevant technical expertise.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18649\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Arts and Humanities Research Council on its approach to supporting research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18650\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council on its approach to supporting research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18651\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had since with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council on its approach to supporting research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18652\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Economic and Social Research Council on its approach to supporting research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18653\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Medical Research Council on its approach to supporting research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18654\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Natural Environment Research Council on its approach to support research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18655\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Science and Technology Facilities Council on research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18656\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with Innovate UK on research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18657\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with Research England on research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18661\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with UK Research and Innovation on their approach to research into (a) space weather and (b) its consequences since July 2024.

Chris Bryant:

Ministers have had no such discussions.

However, as a part of their portfolio UKRI work with the Met Office to deliver the Space weather instrumentation, measurement, modelling and risk (SWIMMR), a £20 million, four-year programme that will improve the UK's capabilities for space weather monitoring and prediction.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18662\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with businesses on the Government's approach to research into (a) space weather and (b) its consequences since July 2024.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18663\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with universities on research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Chris Bryant:

The Department has regular discussions with businesses and universities, including space stakeholders, on a range of issues although there have been no discussions on space weather and its consequences.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18664\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions he has had with the Geospatial Commission on research into space weather and its consequences since July 2024.

Chris Bryant:

None

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18665\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of UK research into space weather and its consequences on domestic cybersecurity.

Chris Bryant:

The UK continues to prioritise activities to mitigate the impacts of space weather.

Severe space weather is identified in our National Risk Register and our response is outlined in the Severe Space Weather Preparedness Strategy.

Dr Ben Spencer: [\[18667\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of AI regulation for UK research into space weather and its consequences.

Chris Bryant:

AI is a general-purpose technology, with a wide array of applications. The UK's existing expert regulators are best placed to regulate the vast majority of AI systems in the context in which they're deployed.

■ Voice over Internet Protocol

Dame Caroline Dinenage: [\[18527\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he plans to run an awareness campaign for the switchover from analogue to digital phone lines.

Chris Bryant:

The Government is supporting plans put forward by major communication providers to run an awareness campaign, paid for by industry, for the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) migration to digital landlines. The campaign will be launched in 2025.

■ Voice over Internet Protocol: Gosport

Dame Caroline Dinenage: [\[18528\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the migration of analogue phone lines to digital voice over internet protocol on elderly people in Gosport.

Chris Bryant:

The Government recognises that some customers may face heightened risks during the migration from the analogue landline network to voice over internet protocol and my officials and I have worked hard since the election on mitigating risks to vulnerable people across the country. On 18 November 2024, the Department

published guidance for communication providers on how to identify and support these customers when their landline migrates.

The Department also published a checklist of activities that communication providers must take before migrating customers to voice over internet protocol without their active consent. We expect providers to meet the safeguards set out in this checklist to keep customers safe throughout the migration.

TRANSPORT

■ Bus Services

Nick Timothy:

[\[19475\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions she has had with (a) Stagecoach and (b) Stephensons on the frequency of buses in (i) England, (ii) the East of England and (iii) Suffolk.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department for Transport meets regularly with stakeholders, including bus operators, to discuss policy relating to local bus services.

■ Bus Services: Disability

Matt Bishop:

[\[19861\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking to ensure bus travel is accessible for people with disabilities.

Simon Lightwood:

The government wants everyone to have access to public transport and is committed to improving services so they are more inclusive and enable disabled people to travel safely, confidently and with dignity. On October 1st, the first phase of the Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 came into force, meaning that newer vehicles providing local services must provide audible and visible information on stops, destinations and diversions. The majority of services will need to comply by October 2026.

The government will also shortly introduce a new Bus Services Bill that will give local leaders the freedom to take decisions to deliver their local transport priorities and ensure networks meet the needs of the communities who rely on them, including disabled people.

■ Chiltern Railways: Information Services

Peter Fortune:

[\[19549\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the accessibility of the consultation entitled RVAR 2010 exemption: Chiltern Railways passenger information system, published on 3 December 2024.

Simon Lightwood:

The Department for Transport considers the 'RVAR 2010 exemption: Chiltern Railways passenger information system' consultation to be accessible.

Rail vehicle accessibility public consultations are published on GOV.UK in a format known as HTML which is accessible by default and easier for most people to use.

The consultation offers two mechanisms, email and post, for consultees to respond via.

■ Cycleways: Westmorland and Furness**Tim Farron:**[\[19669\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will provide additional funding for Westmorland and Furness Council to maintain cycleways.

Simon Lightwood:

The Government takes the condition of local highway assets, including roads and cycleways, very seriously and is committed to maintaining and renewing the local highway network. As a local highway authority, Westmorland and Furness Council is responsible for the condition of all parts of its local highway network, including cycleways and footways.

In the current financial year, the Department has provided over £20.7 million of highway maintenance funding to Westmorland and Furness Council to enable it to maintain all parts of its local highway network. Highways maintenance funding allocations for 2025/26 will be announced shortly. Active travel capital funding allocations for local authorities in 2024/25, will also be announced in due course.

■ Driverless Vehicles**Mike Reader:**[\[18828\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of including the regulation of self-driving delivery robots alongside other forms of micro mobility.

Lilian Greenwood:

This government is determined to seize the opportunities of emerging micromobility and tackle any negative impacts which may arise. We actively monitor the industry and the new vehicle types and business models being developed while carefully considering policy steps to ensure these are operating safely and in the interests of our communities.

■ Driving Licences**Mr Peter Bedford:**[\[19587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the efficiency of (a) traffic commissioners and (b) DVLA offices in processing licence renewals for C1 vehicle handlers.

Lilian Greenwood:

A functional review of the work of the traffic commissioners was carried out in 2021-2022 and the report can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-commissioner-function-review-2021-to-2022. The Department is working towards implementing the recommendations of the review.

Where the Secretary of State has concerns about the conduct of an applicant for a large goods vehicle or passenger carrying vehicle driving licence, the matter may be referred to a traffic commissioner for consideration.

Where appropriate cases are referred to a traffic commissioner, they are provided administrative support by Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency staff who are deployed to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner. The Senior Traffic Commissioner has issued statutory guidance to assist traffic commissioners in adopting a consistent approach. This can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-commissioners-vocational-driver-conduct-january-2016>. As part of the strategic objectives of the traffic commissioners, a review of this document is currently being undertaken.

Straightforward applications for vocational driving licences are being processed within normal turnaround times. Applications where a medical condition must be investigated before a licence can be issued may take longer as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency is often reliant on receiving information from third parties, for example doctors, other healthcare professionals or the applicant themselves, before a decision on whether to issue a licence can be made.

■ Electric Scooters: Public Places**Ian Roome:****[19928]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of taking steps to give people with disabilities additional rights to use electric scooters in public spaces.

Simon Lightwood:

This government is determined to seize the opportunities of emerging micromobility and tackle any negative impacts which may arise. We actively monitor the industry and the new vehicle types and business models being developed while carefully considering policy steps to ensure these are operating safely and in the interests of our communities. A key part of these considerations will be how new technologies can benefit disabled people.

■ Electric Vehicles: Charging Points**Carla Denyer:****[18729]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 9 December 2024 to Question 17936 on Electric Vehicles: Charging Points, if she will publish her assessment of the differences in the cost per kWh of public and home electric vehicle charging.

Lilian Greenwood:

There are no current plans for the Department for Transport to publish an assessment of the differences in cost of public and home vehicle charging. A number of assessments are already publicly available such as this analysis by the RAC: Electric car public charging costs | RAC Charge Watch | RAC Drive

■ Electric Vehicles: National Security**Mr Connor Rand:**[\[18759\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment his Department has made of the potential implications for his policies of the national security risks of (a) electric vehicles and (b) connected cars using (i) Chinese and (ii) Russian software.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government takes national security extremely seriously. The Department of Transport (DfT) works closely with the transport sector and the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and other government departments, including the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), to understand and respond to risks associated with all connected vehicles, including electric vehicles.

The UK has also led the development of international requirements for all car manufacturers to tackle any possible cyber risk in their designs, and we will continue to work with international partners to safeguard national security risks.

■ Great British Railways**Edward Morello:**[\[19200\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department plans to take to help support the transition to Great British Railways.

Simon Lightwood:

While primary legislation is required to establish Great British Railways, the government has begun delivering improvements for passengers and freight users straight away.

That is why the main organisations responsible for the operational railway (Network Rail, the Rail Services group in the Department for Transport, and the DfT Operator) have begun working together in closer collaboration to establish a Shadow Great British Railways bringing together track and train ahead of legislation.

Edward Morello:[\[19204\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what her timeline is for the establishment of Great British Railways; and what key milestones she expects to reach in the next 12 months.

Simon Lightwood:

The King's Speech confirmed legislation – the Railways Bill – will be introduced to create Great British Railways in the first Parliamentary session. The consultation on

this legislation will be published around the turn of the year. We anticipate GBR to be set up over the following 12 months after the legislation receives Royal Assent.

■ **Motor Vehicles: Lighting**

Clive Jones:

[\[19164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Answer of 5 September 2024 to Question 3112 on Motor Vehicles: Lighting, whether the independent research has begun; when the results of that research are expected; and whether she plans to introduce new regulations to limit glare from motor vehicle headlights.

Lilian Greenwood:

The independent headlamp glare research commenced in October and is expected to deliver in summer 2025. The Government will consider carefully the outcome of that research to determine what action might be appropriate.

■ **Office of Rail and Road: Equality**

Sir John Hayes:

[\[18881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Office of Rail and Road.

Mike Kane:

The Office of Rail and Road employs no full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff.

■ **Pedicabs: Greater London**

David Taylor:

[\[19841\]](#)

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 the lights and loud noises made by pedicabs in central London on people with neurological conditions affected by sound and light.

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 equalities considerations throughout the consultation process.

■ Railway Stations: South Basildon and East Thurrock**James McMurdock:**[\[18866\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the condition of train stations in South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency.

Simon Lightwood:

The Annual Business Planning round for 2025/26 is currently underway where the adequacy of funding for c2c will be considered. This includes the budget for assets, which covers the condition of train stations in the South Basildon and East Thurrock constituency and all across the c2c network.

■ Railway Stations: Spalding**Sir John Hayes:**[\[18484\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of the support provided for people with mobility issues to access trains at Spalding station.

Simon Lightwood:

No recent assessment has been made regarding accessibility at Spalding Station.

Spalding Station has step free access to platforms.

■ Railways: Investment and Planning**Edward Morello:**[\[19205\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the time taken to establish Great British Railways on long-term (a) investment and (b) planning in the rail industry.

Simon Lightwood:

The stand up of Great British Railways will happen in parallel to the continued operation of the railway, therefore not impacting long-term investment. As for the passenger service business planning, this won't change and Network Rail still have the Control Period funding settlement.

■ Railways: North of England**Jerome Mayhew:**[\[18617\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when her Department projects that the Transpennine Route Upgrade will be completed.

Lilian Greenwood:

The core Transpennine Route Upgrade programme is currently scheduled for completion in the early 2030s, with incremental benefits delivery before then, including a rolling programme of electrification and station enhancements. Full

benefits delivery, including digital signalling, will be made available by the mid-2030s, facilitating further enhancements to east-west rail connectivity across the Pennines.

■ Roads: Construction

Jerome Mayhew: [\[18618\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when her Department projects that the A57 link road upgrade will be completed.

Lilian Greenwood:

The A57 Link Road scheme will shortly be starting full construction and works are expected to be complete in 2028.

■ Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

Michael Payne: [\[19123\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what the total allocation given to each Local Authority is for pothole repairs.

Michael Payne: [\[19124\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, with reference to paragraph 3.19 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, how much of the £500 million funding for pothole repairs will be awarded to each local authority.

Lilian Greenwood:

The Government takes the condition of local roads very seriously and is committed to maintaining and renewing the local highway network. Each local highway authority is responsible for the condition of its local network. Highway maintenance funding allocations for all local highway authorities for the current financial year are available on gov.uk. The Government will confirm funding allocations for the 2025/26 financial year shortly, and will publish them on gov.uk.

■ South Western Railway: Rolling Stock

Edward Morello: [\[19198\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps her Department is taking to replace end-of-life rolling stock on South Western Railways.

Simon Lightwood:

South Western Railway has procured 750 new Class 701 vehicles to replace the older Class 455 units. The first trains have entered passenger service, with a gradual roll out expected over the next two years.

■ Southeastern Trains: Rolling Stock

Mr Louie French: [\[19084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing funding for new rolling stock for Southeastern metro services.

Simon Lightwood:

Southeastern is currently out to market with a live procurement exercise to replace its ageing metro fleet. This could be through refurbishing or cascading existing rolling stock, new build, or a combination of both. Any replacement rolling stock will be subject to a successful business case, required to support the investment decision and ensure value for money.

■ Train Operating Companies: Standards**Jerome Mayhew:**[\[18622\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether her Department plans to implement key performance indicators to measure the performance of rail operators after franchises have expired.

Simon Lightwood:

Under the provisions of the Passenger Railways Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, passenger services operations currently delivered by privately-owned operators under National Rail Contracts with the Department will transfer into public ownership when existing contracts expire.

The Department will continue to hold all operators to account for their performance through a range of measures, including key performance indicators.

The Department is also working on plans with operators and Network Rail to display performance information at stations – this will provide passengers with transparency and will allow the public to hold the rail industry and the Department to account for delivery.

■ Transport: Rural Areas**Stuart Anderson:**[\[19026\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps she is taking with local authorities to develop integrated transport systems in rural areas.

Simon Lightwood:

We are committed to empowering local leaders to design and operate transport systems that better serve local needs. The Integrated National Transport Strategy will establish a people-first approach to transport across all areas and set the vision for better integration. The Department is already supporting rural connectivity through the Rural Transport Accelerator, and the Buses Bill which will place power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders across England.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture: Inheritance Tax****Wendy Chamberlain:****[19035]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 18 November 2024 to Question 13623 on Agriculture: Inheritance Tax, whether she has made a comparative assessment of the potential impact of (a) agricultural property relief and (b) business property relief on tenant farmers in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK.

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.

In accordance with standard practice, a tax information and impact note will be published alongside the draft legislation before the relevant Finance Bill.

■ Capital Gains Tax**Gareth Davies:****[19423]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to her Department's policy paper entitled Capital Gains Tax: Rates of tax — carried interest, published on 30 October 2024, what the evidential basis is for the cost of implementing a one year increase to Capital Gains Tax.

James Murray:

The published operational costs represent a high-level cost estimate for the changes required to HMRC IT systems to deliver this policy change which follow a recognised standard methodology. HMRC do not provide detailed costs related to policy changes.

Separately, the revenue impacts of the changes to the rates of Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on carried interest from 6 April 2025 are included in the costings published in the main Autumn Budget 2024 document.

The CGT changes are the first step of a reform package that will put the tax treatment of carried interest on a fairer and sustainable footing, while preserving the competitiveness of the UK as a fund management fund. From 6 April 2026, the carried interest tax regime will move fully across to the Income Tax framework; this will be legislated in a future Finance Bill, which the House will have the opportunity to consider.

■ Corporation Tax: Investment

Liam Byrne:

[\[18499\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the amount of additional business investment due to the capital allowances measures in the corporate tax roadmap.

James Murray:

As a government, we are determined to provide the stability needed by businesses to make investments that are critical to boosting growth in the UK.

That is why, in the Corporate Tax Roadmap, the Government has committed to maintaining the fundamental features of our world-leading capital allowances system, for the duration of this Parliament. This includes permanent full expensing system and the £1 million Annual Investment Allowance. As a result of permanent full expensing, the OBR expect business investment to increase by around £3 billion each year, and in the long run GDP will be 0.2% higher each year.

With a stable and predictable capital allowances system, businesses will be able to rebuild the confidence they need to make significant long-term investment decisions.

■ Employers' Contributions: Public Services

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[18846\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will extend the Employment Allowance to (a) GPs and (b) other people providing public services.

James Murray:

The Government has not changed the eligibility rules on the Employment Allowance beyond removing the £100,000 eligibility threshold.

Government guidance on the Employment Allowance states that you 'cannot claim if you're a public body or business doing more than half your work in the public sector – unless you're a charity'.

The eligibility of a specific sector or organisation will depend on the make-up of an individual business's work.

■ High Rise Flats: Fire Prevention

Torsten Bell:

[\[19108\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 2 December 2024 to Question 16634 on high rise building remediation taken on by the FSCS, how much and what proportion of the costs covered by East West Insurance Company policies relate to policies originally written by Zurich Insurance.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Joint Administrators of East West Insurance Company (EWIC) published a report in 2021 that confirmed that all of EWIC's building guarantee and warranty policies originated with Zurich Insurance. As disclosed previously, the best estimate for the

costs to resolve building remediation work covered by EWIC policies is approximately £335m.

■ Individual Savings Accounts

Ashley Dalton: [19090]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of adjusting the Lifetime ISA property price cap in line with (a) inflation and (b) average house prices.

Tulip Siddiq:

Data from the latest [UK House Price Index\(opens in a new tab\)](#) shows that while the average price paid by first-time buyers has increased, it is still below the LISA property price cap in all regions of the UK except for London, where the average price paid is affected by boroughs with very high property values.

The Government keeps all aspects of savings tax policy under review.

■ Investment

Callum Anderson: [19137]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information her Department holds on the total value of investments in (a) cash, (b) stocks and shares, (c) innovative finance and (d) lifetime ISAs in each of the past five tax years, broken down by investors' income bracket.

Callum Anderson: [19138]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what information her Department holds on the total market value of (a) cash and (b) stocks and shares ISA holdings in each of the past five tax years, broken down by investor income bracket.

Tulip Siddiq:

Information on the total value of ISA subscriptions, the total market value of ISAs, and the number of ISA holders and subscribers broken down by income bands is available in HMRC's Annual Savings Statistics.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-savings-statistics>

■ Members: Correspondence

Clive Jones: [19162]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when the Economic Secretary to the Treasury plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Wokingham on the Equitable Life Policy compensation scheme, dated 30 October 2024.

Tulip Siddiq:

A response was sent to the hon. Member for Wokingham on 27 November 2024.

■ Mortgages: First Time Buyers

Jim Shannon: [\[18939\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions she has had with mortgage providers on the availability of low deposit mortgages for first time buyers.

Tulip Siddiq:

The Government is regularly in contact with mortgage lenders on all aspects of their business, including the provision of finance to first time buyers.

This Government will turn the dream of owning a home into a reality by fixing the planning system and building 1.5 million more homes, as well as helping buyers who are struggling to save for a large deposit by introducing a permanent Mortgage Guarantee Scheme. As set out in the Chancellor's recent Budget, we will announce further details of the scheme in Phase 2 of the Spending Review.

■ National Insurance Contributions

Graeme Downie: [\[18805\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what income HMRC has derived from (a) class two and (b) class four National Insurance contributions in each of the past five years.

Graeme Downie: [\[18806\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) class two and (b) class four National Insurance payees there were in (i) 2019-20, (ii) 2020-21, (iii) 2021-22, (iv) 2022-23 and (v) 2023-24.

Graeme Downie: [\[18807\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate she has made of the number of (a) class two and (b) class four National Insurance payees in the 2024-25 financial year.

Graeme Downie: [\[18808\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) men and (b) women paid class two National Insurance contributions in each of the past five years.

Graeme Downie: [\[18809\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) men and (b) women paid Class Four National Insurance contributions in each of the last five years.

Graeme Downie: [\[18810\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) men and (b) women paid Class Two National Insurance contributions in each of the last five years in each (i) nation and (ii) region.

Graeme Downie: [\[18811\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) men and (b) women paid Class Four National Insurance contributions in each of the last five years in each (i) nation and (ii) region.

Graeme Downie:

[18812]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) men and (b) women paid Class Two National Insurance contributions in each of the last five years by income decile.

Graeme Downie:

[18813]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) men and (b) women paid Class Four National Insurance contributions in each of the last five years by income decile.

James Murray:

HMRC does not routinely publish estimates of the number of Class 2 or Class 4 National Insurance payees in total or any of the subsets asked for in the series of questions.

HMRC only publishes total National Insurance Contributions receipts across all classes and the OBR only publishes Class 2 and Class 4 National Insurance Contribution receipts combined together for projections years and one year of outturn.

To produce a set of reliable estimates of all the different data requested would only be possible at disproportionate cost.

■ Office of Budget Responsibility: Reviews

Mr Gregory Campbell:

[19638]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when the Office of Budget Responsibility is next due to have an external review.

James Murray:

The Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011 states that the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR's) Non-executive committee must appoint a person or body at least once in every 5-year period to review and report on the OBR.

The Chair of the Oversight Board for the OBR formally commissioned the third external review on 24 May 2024 which is published on the OBR's website:

https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/Third-OBR-external-review_commissioning-letter_24-May-2024.pdf.

Previous external reviews are published on the OBR's website. <https://obr.uk/about-the-obr/external-reviews/>

■ Poverty

Matt Vickers:

[18674]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Autumn Budget 2024 on levels of poverty.

James Murray:

The Government is developing an ambitious and comprehensive strategy to reduce child poverty.

Autumn Budget 2024 announced measures to support households who face the greatest hardships. This support includes a new Fair Repayment Rate which caps deductions made through Universal Credit at 15% of the standard allowance. Before the budget, it was 25% meaning this change will benefit 1.2m families who will be better off by £420 per annum on average.

The government also committed £1 billion in 2025-26, including Barnett consequences, to extend the Household Support Fund (HSF) in England, and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) in England and Wales. The HSF will help households facing the greatest hardship and financial crisis, including supporting them with the cost of essentials such as food, energy and water.

As shown in the analysis published alongside the Autumn Budget 2024, the impacts of government decisions are progressive and benefit households in the lowest income deciles the most in 2025-26. Overall, on average, all but the richest 10% of households will benefit from policy decisions in 2025-26.

■ **Russia: Money Laundering**

Stephen Gethins:

[\[18561\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of placing Russia on a domestic money laundering watchlist.

Tulip Siddiq:

The UK's list of high-risk third countries aligns with those countries identified by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as having strategic deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing regimes, which ensures that the identification of high-risk third countries is underpinned by the FATF's consistent, technical methodology, and robust assessment processes.

Russia is not included in either the FATF's or UK's list of high-risk third countries. However, regulated businesses should in practice already be taking enhanced due diligence measures in relation to Russia because the UK Money Laundering Regulations require enhanced scrutiny in situations that present a high risk of money laundering or terrorist financing, and the UK's National Risk Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing 2020 specifically highlights the significant volume of illicit finance emanating from Russia.

■ **State Retirement Pensions: National Insurance Contributions**

Freddie van Mierlo:

[\[18823\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps she is taking to reduce (a) delays and (b) complexities in obtaining the necessary information to purchase additional years of National Insurance contributions to maximise their state pension (a) faced by women and (b) generally.

James Murray:

To support customers, HMRC and DWP enhanced the online Check your State Pension forecast service in April 2024. New functionality enables the majority of

working age customers to self-serve by viewing their State Pension forecast, see payable gaps and make payments online.

The Future Pensions Centre and the National Insurance helpline remain in place for customers who are unable to use the online service, as well as customers who prefer that route or who need additional assistance.

Both departments are putting in place measures to manage the expected demand in the run-up to the 5 April 2025 deadline, including managing the deployment of resources, the use of callbacks, digitising and improving forms for overseas individuals, interactive voice response messaging and directing customers to the digital service.

■ **Taxation: International Cooperation**

Kate Osamor:

[\[18580\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether she has had recent discussions with her G20 counterparts on a global agreement to tax the world's richest individuals.

James Murray:

The UK was pleased to support the Rio de Janeiro G20 Ministerial Declaration on International Tax Cooperation, including the commitment to cooperate to ensure that ultra-high-net-worth individuals are effectively taxed.

The Government is committed to making sure that the richest in our society pay their fair share on their wealth and assets. That is why the Chancellor announced a series of reforms at the Budget on 30 October to make the tax system fairer and more sustainable.

The G20 can play an important role in helping countries implement progressive tax systems by sharing best practice, building capacity on tackling avoidance and evasion, and supporting international cooperation to increase tax transparency.

WALES

■ **ASW: Workplace Pensions**

Ann Davies:

[\[19900\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the pensions of former Allied Steel and Wire workers.

Jo Stevens:

The Government is committed to supporting both current and retired steelworkers. That is why we are supporting the continuation of steelmaking at Port Talbot and providing up to £100million to support the community through this transition.

The Government is aware of the concerns surrounding the matter of indexation of pre-1997 accruals in the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS), including for former members of the Allied Steel and Wire pension scheme.

Affected members of the FAS have engaged with the Department for Work and Pensions on this issue, and this was a matter considered by the Work and Pensions Select Committee in its recent inquiry into Defined Benefit pensions.

The Minister for Pensions is looking closely at this issue, supported by the Committee's final report, published in March 2024, which helpfully outlines areas to be considered.

■ **Wales Office: Alcoholic Drinks**

Cat Smith: [\[19344\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether ministers in her Department have met with representatives of the alcohol industry since July 2024.

Jo Stevens:

Details of ministers' meetings with external individuals and organisations are published quarterly in arrears on GOV.UK. Data for the period of July to September 2024 will be published in due course.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

■ **Disability and Ethnic Groups: Equality**

Mike Amesbury: [\[19756\]](#)

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking to consult with (a) disabled and (b) Black peoples' organisations on the planned implementation of the draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.

Anneliese Dodds:

We are committed to championing the rights of everyone and boosting opportunity for people of all backgrounds. The Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for large employers and enshrine in law the right to equal pay for ethnic minority and disabled people.

Officials in the Office for Equality and Opportunity have been discussing proposals with a wide range of stakeholders and we will formally consult on them shortly.

■ **Equality and Human Rights Commission: Staff**

Sir John Hayes: [\[18489\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, how many full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion staff are employed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Anneliese Dodds:

All staff at the Equality and Human Rights Commission are working to advance equality through their statutory remit. No staff are specifically employed in full-time equivalent diversity, equality and inclusion roles.

■ Government Departments: Equality

Nick Timothy:

[19480]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will publish Public Sector Equality Duty implementation guidance for each (a) Government Department and (b) arms-length body.

Anneliese Dodds:

Decisions about the development of guidance regarding internal processes to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty are for individual departments to make. Publicly available guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty includes the Equality and Human Rights Commission's technical guidance that covers complying with the duty in practice.

■ Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon:

[19298]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help protect religious minorities.

Anneliese Dodds:

This government is clear that no one should be disadvantaged because of their religion or belief. The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination to anyone with a religious or philosophical belief, as well as to those who lack a religion or belief.

The Minister for Women and Equalities will continue to work with the Minister for Faith in MHCLG to ensure that people of faith are not discriminated against, in line with the Act.

■ Sexual Harassment

Mike Amesbury:

[19755]

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, how she plans to monitor the effectiveness of the new preventative duty on sexual harassment.

Anneliese Dodds:

The Office for Equality and Opportunity will formally review the Worker Protection (Amendment to the Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 after five years to evaluate its effectiveness.

We will use Employment Tribunal data and Acas management information to monitor the impact of the new duty.

We are also taking action to strengthen the duty through the Employment Rights Bill to require employers to take "all reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment of their employees.

WORK AND PENSIONS■ **Care Leavers: Universal Credit****Jess Asato:**[\[16666\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many care leavers in England claimed Universal Credit between 1 April 2023 and 1 April 2024.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The information requested is not available.

DWP stated routinely collecting data on care leavers claiming UC in February 2022. All new claimants are now given the option of reporting their care leaver status, and work coaches can record existing claimants' care leaver status if they are told about this.

This data is being monitored for data quality and does not meet the quality assurance standards for official statistics: the data coverage is still very limited and the claimants we have data on are not representative of the UC caseload. It is hoped that information will be available for publication in 2027. I have asked officials to explore the potential for answering this question from other data sources.

■ **Children: Disability****Ben Coleman:**[\[19214\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate her Department has made of the additional costs to families for raising a disabled child.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The DWP pays close attention to the evidence base on the extra costs faced by disabled children, including external academic research but does not endorse a particular external study.

For example, Scope's Disability Price Tag (2023) uses a sensitive economic modelling methodology called the standard of living approach. They state that a family with a disabled child would have to pay £581 a month to have the same standard of living as a family with a non-disabled child. For 1 in 5 families, these costs can exceed £1000 per month. The existing evidence base that uses similar methodologies produce a wide range of estimates of this cost, ranging from £600 to £1,500 per month, reflecting a high degree of uncertainty around the true additional costs faced by families raising a disabled child.

■ **Children: Poverty****Ben Coleman:**[\[19212\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with disabled children's charities, in the context of the development of a child poverty strategy.

Ben Coleman:

[19213]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with disabled young people, in the context of the development of a child poverty strategy.

Alison McGovern:

The Child Poverty Taskforce, of which the Department of Education Secretary of State is Co-Chair, is building on the wealth of existing evidence and expertise across the UK to develop an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty. We are listening carefully to the voices of children with disabilities and special educational needs (SEND) who live in poverty, as well as the charities and organisations that represent them. Examples of the engagement we've undertaken are events with: Contact, a charity for families with disabled children; ALLFIE, a campaign group focused on including disabled learners in mainstream education; and the Challenging Behaviour Foundation that aims to improve the life opportunities for young people with severe learning disabilities and their families.

The Taskforce recognises that poverty impacts the whole family so, alongside this, a forum of parents and carers has been brought together to input to the Strategy. The approach has been designed to be inclusive and capture the experiences of a broad range of parents, carers and children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

■ Department for Work and Pensions: Artificial Intelligence

Chi Onwurah:

[19693]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will publish the equality impact assessment carried out prior to the introduction of the Advances Model artificial intelligence system.

Andrew Western:

DWP has considered the benefits and risks of publishing the results of Equality Impact Assessment. DWP has concluded it is not in the public interest to do so because it will undermine the effectiveness of the model as a fraud prevention control and therefore erode the ability to protect the public purse.

You can find further information in the [ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS 2023-24 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) page 112.

Chi Onwurah:

[19694]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what timetable her Department has for conducting a fairness analysis on the Advances Model artificial intelligence system in respect of potential bias according to race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, pregnancy, maternity or gender reassignment status.

Andrew Western:

DWP is committed to continue iterating the fairness analysis method and improving the data available for future analyses for the machine learning Advances model. Fairness analysis will be completed at regular intervals, the results of which will

continue to inform regular decisions on the continued operation and improvement of the model as a reasonable and proportionate fraud prevention control.

■ **Department for Work and Pensions: Mental Health**

Jessica Toale:

[18768]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department is implementing a trauma-informed approach across all its services.

Andrew Western:

The Trauma Informed Approach recognises the pervasive impacts that trauma may have on an individual's life; these impacts can span social, emotional, physiological, neurological and spiritual functioning. The impacts of trauma can make interacting with services a difficult and potentially retraumatising experience, the trauma informed approach is a way of trying to avoid and mitigate this risk whilst creating a safe and empowering environment for all colleagues and customers. The approach has six core pillars: safety, trustworthiness, choice, empowerment, collaboration and cultural consideration (Office for Health Improvements and Disparities, 2022).

The DWP has a dedicated Trauma Informed Approach Integration Programme and we are at the start of an ambitious journey. Our integration programme applies the six core pillars of the approach within the framework of, our colleagues, our customers, our culture and the context of our interactions (whether that is physical, telephony, digital or postal). The design of the programme has been informed by close working with operational teams across the department and is being tested in our Trauma Informed 'Pulse points' and innovation hubs. Alongside internal and external experts, we have established an eight-stage roadmap for implementation across the DWP with a core focus on co-production with colleagues, customers and stakeholders. We anticipate we will have completed the eight stages of design by 2030, making trauma informed approaches fundamental to our business-as-usual approach.

Jessica Toale:

[18769]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what training her Department provides to its staff on supporting people who have experienced trauma.

Andrew Western:

The DWP has a dedicated Trauma Informed Approach Integration Programme and we are at the start of an ambitious journey. Our integration programme applies the six core pillars of the approach; safety, trustworthiness, choice, empowerment, collaboration and cultural consideration within the framework of, our colleagues, our customers, our culture and the context of our interactions (whether that is physical, telephony, digital or postal). Alongside internal and external experts, we have established an eight-stage roadmap for implementation. We anticipate we will have completed the eight stages of design by 2030, making trauma informed approaches fundamental to our business-as-usual approach.

With response to the query around what training is provided, as part of a wider trauma informed training framework we have piloted an introductory module for all

colleagues to develop awareness of the pervasive impacts of trauma and to develop the skills required for trauma informed interactions with customers. This product is currently in iteration to align with the wider trauma informed framework of learning that becomes more intensive depending on the colleague's role. This module is part of a wider roll out within the framework which will be coproduced with customers, colleagues and experts. Supplementary learning products will also be made available to support embedding trauma informed principles into our business-as-usual approach.

■ **Disability: Universal Credit**

Anna Dixon:

[\[18471\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when her Department plans to decide (a) how and (b) when people affected by the loss of the enhanced disability premium when migrating to Universal Credit will receive the additional amount prescribed in the Universal Credit (Transitional Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 2023.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Regulations to provide additional transitional protection for those in receipt of Enhanced Disability premium came into force on 14th February 2024 for eligible customers to Universal Credit.

The Department is fully committed to identifying and paying eligible customers who have already moved to Universal Credit.

This is a highly complex issue and work is continuing at pace on the solution to make back payments and monthly payments is expected to commence in a controlled manner in Quarter 1 of 2025, subject to payment accuracy assurances being satisfied.

■ **Education and Employment: Scarborough and Whitby**

Alison Hume:

[\[19178\]](#)

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 Scarborough and Whitby constituency.

Alison McGovern:

The Youth Guarantee will ensure that all 18-21 year olds have access to education and training opportunities or support to find work. All young people will have access to the same core national offer and entitlements under the Youth Guarantee.

However, we know that the needs of young people and the labour market vary in different areas across England, so it is important that local areas are able to tailor the Youth Guarantee, so it best meets those needs. As a first step, the Get Britain Working White Paper announced funding for 8 Youth Guarantee Trailblazer areas in England in 2025/26. Learning from the Trailblazers will inform our approach in the future.

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.

Work is underway on the design and delivery of the new Youth Guarantee. We are unable to make an official assessment of the potential impact of the Youth Guarantee on young people in Scarborough and Whitby constituency at this early stage.

■ Employment Rights Bill

Matt Vickers:

[\[18673\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade on the potential impact of the Employment Rights Bill on the employment rate.

Alison McGovern:

The Secretary of State, and ministers, regularly meet with Cabinet and ministerial colleagues, regarding a range of matters.

Our ambitions are to reverse the trend of inactivity, and to raise both productivity and living standards whilst improving the quality of work. To help achieve this, we have set a long-term ambition to achieve an 80% employment rate, demonstrating our commitment to bringing those furthest away from the labour market into it, increasing local labour supply.

Achieving our ambitions requires a cross-government approach, which is why the Employment Rights Bill will make work more secure, boost wages, and help people thrive by supporting them into and to get on in work.

■ Employment: Knowsley

Anneliese Midgley:

[\[19104\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to improve access to employment opportunities for disabled people in Knowsley constituency.

Alison McGovern:

The Government is committed to supporting disabled people with their employment journey. We are delivering a range of initiatives in Knowsley and across Merseyside to support disabled people into work including support from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres and through Access to Work grants.

Disability Employment Advisers hold regular health-themed events in both Kirkby and Huyton Jobcentres, alongside partner organisations that support customers with managing health conditions and gaining skills. All events have a 'quiet hour', accessible for customers with Autism, special educational needs and mental health issues. Where health presents a barrier to employment, customers can benefit from additional time with a Work Coach.

Employers play a key role in increasing employment opportunities and supporting disabled people and those with health conditions to thrive as part of the workforce.

Local employers attend Kirkby and Huyton Jobcentres each week, and over fifty Disability Confident employers joined an employment event in Merseyside recently, all with vacancies and over 400 customers attending. The department works closely with Knowsley Chamber with regular sessions delivered to employers on Disability Confident and Access to Work, supporting them with reasonable adjustments for new employees and helping to retain staff.

As part of a wider project across Liverpool City Region, we are collaborating with Knowsley Borough Council to support people with special educational needs, disabled young adults, their parents, schools and colleges across Merseyside, on the transition between education and employment. This includes 'Meet the Employer Sessions' in our Jobcentres, with information on jobs, training and apprenticeships.

We have close links with Knowsley Works who run a positive inclusion programme for customers with physical and mental health needs. For customers with addiction issues, we have close working with Individual Placement and Support who attend our Jobcentres to speak to customers and work with peer mentors to encourage them to make better choices.

Several programmes have been funded locally to support disabled people move closer to work in Knowsley, including 'Stepping Forward', counselling and support for those customers who struggle to leave the house due to physical and mental impairments, dyslexia support which includes assessment and one-to-one support to help customers gain and retain employment and autism support.

■ Employment: Rural Areas

Stuart Anderson:

[19027]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to support older workers in rural settings.

Alison McGovern:

The government is reforming jobcentres to better match people with the right jobs and provide employment, skills, and career-focused support to individuals, including those in rural and coastal areas.

A new national jobs and careers service will be introduced to help more people find work, as detailed in the Labour Market White Paper published on 26 November. The new service will cover Great Britain but will be flexible, operating differently in different areas to reflect local systems and needs – including rural areas and reflecting devolution settlements in Scotland and Wales.

DWP currently offers tailored employment support through Jobcentres including a review of health, finances and skills for eligible over 50s on Universal Credit, with an online offer available to all. Our 50plus Champions, provide support through Jobcentres, to drive localised activity. In rural communities this includes adapting delivery of tailored employment programs, and Midlife MOT sessions, to ensure attendees in rural communities, can access information on local employability training courses and job opportunities.

■ Employment: Women

Matt Vickers:

[\[19074\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of trends in the level of women in employment since 2010.

Alison McGovern:

The Government is committed to tackling the challenges women face in the labour market and takes seriously the challenges they face in balancing work with other life events. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public authorities to consider impacts on those with protected characteristics, including sex, when exercising their functions, like making decisions. Female participation in the labour market grew substantially over the 2010s, predominantly driven by changes to the female State Pension Age. In recent years, participation has stalled and has only grown by 0.9 percentage points in the last 5 years, and the employment rate for women aged 16-64 currently stands at 72.1%. (Source: Labour Force Survey, Jul-Sep 2024).

As set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper, too many women who care for their families still experience challenges staying and progressing in work. This is reflected in the higher rates of female inactivity and unpaid carers, and contributes to the gender pay gap. The Get Britain Working White Paper sets out how it will take a system-wide approach to reducing barriers to work, including measures to make it easier to access affordable childcare and manage caring responsibilities alongside work.

■ Menopause: Sick Leave

Jim Shannon:

[\[18943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many women are on long term sick leave due to menopausal symptoms.

Alison McGovern:

Although the government does not collect this data, we have proposed a wide-ranging set of generational reforms to boost protections for workers, including women experiencing menopause symptoms at work. The Government has also committed to publishing guidance, including for small employers, on measures to consider relating to uniform and temperature, flexible working and recording menopause-related leave and absence. Alongside this the Government has appointed a Menopause Employment Ambassador who will work with employers to improve the support for women experiencing menopause symptoms at work.

■ Migrant Workers: English Language

Neil O'Brien:

[\[19001\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people were referred by job centre advisors to a course to improve their English language skills in each year since 2015.

Alison McGovern:

The requested information is not held by the Department for Work and Pensions.

■ Pension Credit**Dan Carden:**[\[18381\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to increase uptake of Pension Credit in winter 2024-25.

Emma Reynolds:

The Department's campaign to promote Pension Credit has been running across Great Britain since September. The latest phase of the campaign, which launched on 8 November, is aimed at friends and family - especially adult children of eligible pensioners - asking them to tell people they know about Pension Credit, encourage them to check their eligibility, as well as help them make a claim. It is running on TV, radio, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, on YouTube and on advertising screens, including on GP and Post Office screens.

The Department's 'Invitation to Claim' initiative was launched on 30 October. Since then, we have written to around 120,000 pensioner households across Great Britain who are in receipt of Housing Benefit but not Pension Credit. The letter and accompanying leaflet urge these households to claim Pension Credit by the 21 December, which is the latest date for making a successful backdated Pension Credit claim and qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment in winter 2024/25.

Matt Vickers:[\[18408\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Pension Credit awareness campaign.

Emma Reynolds:

Our campaign has seen DWP receive around 150,000 Pension Credit applications in the 16 weeks since the Winter Fuel Payment announcement compared to around 61,300 Pension Credit applications in the preceding 16 weeks. This represents a 145% increase in applications. The latest figures also show that 42,500 Pension Credit awards were made since the 29 July.

■ Pension Credit: Social Security Benefits**Mr Gregory Campbell:**[\[19247\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 17079 on Pension Credit: Social Security Benefits, what the average weekly cash total equivalent is of the additional qualifying benefits to which Pension Credit claimants are entitled.

Emma Reynolds:

[Holding answer 16 December 2024]: No estimate has been made as the department is unable to quantify the value of all passported benefits.

■ Refugees: Universal Credit**Rupert Lowe:**[\[18439\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 5 December 2024 to Question 16633 on Department for Work and Pensions: Freedom of Information, if he will publish a breakdown of refugees in receipt of Universal Credit in 2023 by nationality.

Sir Stephen Timms:

The Department is exploring the feasibility of developing suitable official statistics related to the immigration status of non-UK / Irish Universal Credit customers including refugees.

■ Social Security Benefits: Disability**Alex Easton:**[\[19563\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that planned reforms to the disability benefit system provide adequate (a) security and (b) support for (i) seriously ill and (ii) disabled people while enabling those who are able to work to access appropriate opportunities.

Sir Stephen Timms:

This government believes there is a strong case to change the system of health and disability benefits across Great Britain so that it better enables people to enter and remain in work, and to respond to the complex and fluctuating nature of the health conditions many people live with. The system must also work to reduce poverty for disabled people and those with health conditions and support disabled people to live independently.

We want to engage with disabled people, and others with expertise and experience on these issues, to consider how to address these challenges and build a better system. We will be working to develop proposals for reform in the months ahead and will set them out for consultation and engagement in a Green Paper in spring 2025. This government is committed to putting the views and voices of disabled people at the heart of all that we do, so we will consult on these proposals with disabled people and representative organisations.

■ Social Security Benefits: Fraud**John McDonnell:**[\[18481\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many targeted case reviews her Department expects to have carried by the end of 2024.

Andrew Western:

Since the start of Targeted Case Review, the Department expects to have completed around **815,000** Universal Credit claim reviews by the end of December 2024.

Figure is rounded to the nearest 5000.

■ Social Security Benefits: Poverty

Kate Osamor:

[\[18587\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of extending access to benefits for families with children who have no recourse to public funds on levels of child poverty.

Alison McGovern:

In developing a Child Poverty Strategy, the Child Poverty Taskforce is considering all children across the United Kingdom. We recognise the distinct challenges of poverty faced by migrant children. The causes of child poverty are deep-rooted, with solutions that go beyond government, and the Taskforce is exploring all available levers in response.

The Home Office sets the immigration rules and grants immigration leave to individuals which allows them to live and work in the UK. DWP cannot pay public funds benefits to individuals where the Home Office has applied a 'No Recourse to Public Funds' condition to their immigration status.

■ Social Security Benefits: Veterans

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[19628\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will exempt military compensation as income when calculating entitlement to means-tested benefits.

Sir Stephen Timms:

I refer the honourable member to the answer I gave on 5 December 2024 to question UIN [16635](#).

■ State Retirement Pensions: Age

Neil Duncan-Jordan:

[\[18848\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of maintaining the state pension age at 67.

Emma Reynolds:

State Pension age will rise to 67 between 2026 and 2028, as set out in section 26 of the Pensions Act 2014.

Under Section 27 of the Pensions Act 2014, the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to periodically review whether the existing rules about State Pension age are appropriate. To date, there have been two reviews of State Pension age, one in 2017 and one in 2023 and both confirmed that the timetable for the rise to 67 remained appropriate.

The 2017 review can be found at: [State Pension age review 2017: final report - GOV.UK](#). The 2023 review can be found at: [State Pension age Review 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

The next review of State Pension age must be completed by March 2029.

Neil Duncan-Jordan:[\[18849\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will review the planned increase in the state pension age to 68.

Emma Reynolds:

Under Section 27 of the Pensions Act 2014, the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to periodically review whether the existing rules about State Pension age are appropriate.

To date, there have been two statutory Government reviews, one in 2017 and one in 2023.

The next review must be completed by March 2029.

■ **Universal Credit****John McDonnell:**[\[18480\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether algorithm driven risk scoring is being used in the process of selecting Universal Credit claimants for a Targeted Case Review.

Andrew Western:

Algorithm driven risk scoring is not used when selecting cases for a Targeted Case Review.

■ **Wildlife: Rodenticides****David Chadwick:**[\[19851\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for (a) her policies on reducing Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticide exposure in wildlife and (b) the Rodenticide Stewardship Scheme of the report entitled Lost nature, published by Wild Justice on 12 December 2024.

Sir Stephen Timms:

I refer the hon. Member to the previous reply PQ [15550](#).

■ **Work Capability Assessment****Steve Darling:**[\[18711\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of mandatory reconsiderations of work capability assessment decisions have resulted in a different decision in each of the last three years.

Sir Stephen Timms:

Statistics on mandatory reconsiderations of work capability assessment decisions for Employment and Support Allowance can be found at <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>.

Guidance on how to use Stat-Xplore can be found here: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/index.html>. An account is not required to use Stat- Xplore, the 'Guest Login' feature gives instant access to the main functions.

Statistics on mandatory reconsiderations of work capability assessment decisions for Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments are not available, but are in phase 3 of the proposed development timeline of those statistics, so are expected to be published in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

■ Workplace Pensions: Universal Credit

Claire Young:

[19835]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether entitlement to a defined benefit occupational pension affects entitlement to Universal Credit if that pension is not drawn.

Sir Stephen Timms:

It has been a long-standing policy of successive governments to encourage people to save for their retirement. Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit and takes occupational and personal pensions into account when the customer receives that income under the scheme rules.

Where someone reaches the age where Pension Credit is payable, the pension may be treated as available under the long-standing notional income rules. This means that a notional income is taken into account which has the effect of reducing the award of Universal Credit.

Means-tested benefits are paid for out of general taxation, and it is only right that a customer avails themselves of their own financial resources before relying on benefits. These rules provide a fair balance between the needs of the customer and the taxpayer who pays for the cost of means-tested benefits.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS AND TRADE

■ Progress Towards a Modern Industrial Strategy

Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): [\[HCWS319\]](#)

I am delighted to confirm today that the Chancellor and I have appointed a diverse group of the UK's top business leaders, policy experts and trade union leaders to the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council. The Chancellor and I will join the Council for the first meeting later today. This is a key milestone on the path to delivering our new, modern Industrial Strategy – a key pillar in the growth mission of the government. The Council will hardwire stability and long-termism into our plan from the start.

Members will use the first meeting to discuss investment, innovation, and breaking down barriers to growth as well as emerging themes in response to the Industrial Strategy Green Paper. This comes shortly after the end of the Industrial Strategy consultation period, where we received responses from businesses, international investors, unions and others up and down the country to help shape the strategy.

The Government announced the appointment of Clare Barclay as Chair of the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council on 13 October 2024. As the President, Enterprise & Industry, EMEA at Microsoft, Clare is well placed to lead the work of the Council, bringing a wealth of leadership experience from the top-flight of business.

The Chancellor and I are delighted that fifteen of the UK's business leaders, academics, policy experts and trade union leaders have joined the Council to support Clare in this vital work. I have also asked Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell to be the Deputy Chair of the Council. The interim Chair of Skills England and the Chair of the National Wealth Fund will be ex officio members of the Council, to ensure close working between these bodies.

The full list of Industrial Strategy Advisory Council members is:

- Clare Barclay, President, Enterprise & Industry, EMEA, Microsoft (Chair)
- Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell DBE, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Manchester (Deputy Chair)
- Kate Bell, Assistant General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress
- Rt Hon Greg Clark, former Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- Professor Dame Diane Coyle DBE, Bennett Professor of Public Policy, University of Cambridge
- Dame Anita Frew DBE, Chair, Rolls-Royce Holdings
- Greg Jackson CBE, CEO, Octopus Energy
- Sir John Kingman, Chair, Legal & General and Chair, Barclays UK

- Tunde Olanrewaju, Senior Partner, McKinsey
- Professor Henry Overman, Professor of Economic Geography, LSE
- Henrik L. Pedersen, CEO, Associated British Ports
- Aislinn Rice, Non-Executive Director of Analytics Engines
- Roy Rickhuss, General Secretary, Community
- Baroness Vadera, Shriti Vadera, Chair, Prudential plc and Chair of The Royal Shakespeare Company
- Chris Grigg CBE, Chair of the National Wealth Fund (ex officio)
- Richard Pennycook CBE, interim Chair of Skills England (ex officio)

The Council will make and publish recommendations on the development and implementation of the Industrial Strategy, a cross-government strategy supported by engagement with stakeholders. This will include an annual report which will be laid before Parliament. My Cabinet colleagues and I will carefully consider these recommendations. Focusing on growth-driving sectors and how the pro-business environment can help them thrive, the Council will also monitor and evaluate the impact of policies, with data and analysis central to this mission.

The Council will initially focus on supporting development of the Industrial Strategy, including proposals to break down barriers to growth. To achieve this, I have asked the Council to make initial recommendations for consideration by the Chancellor and me to inform discussions at the Growth Mission Board.

The Government has committed to work in partnership with the devolved governments to make this strategy a UK-wide effort.

To underline our commitment to build the long-term certainty and stability that businesses need to invest, we will legislate to place the Council on a statutory footing as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

On 14 October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I published a consultation on our new, modern Industrial Strategy: a credible 10-year plan to deliver the certainty and stability businesses need to invest in the high-growth sectors that will drive our growth mission.

We also set out our vision to create a pro-business environment, support high-potential clusters across the country and deliver growth that is supportive of Net Zero, regional growth, and economic security and resilience. I continue to work closely with the Chancellor and my Cabinet colleagues to ensure we make it simpler and easier for business to invest, thrive and grow.

The consultation underscores our intention across government, and through the council, to design and implement the strategy in lockstep with local leaders, mayors, and devolved leaders across all corners of the UK.

The consultation closed on 25 November 2024. The Department for Business and Trade and HM Treasury will now consider responses in partnership with teams across

government. The response to the consultation will be integrated into the final Industrial Strategy and growth-driving sector plans, to be published alongside the Spending Review in 2025.

■ Response to the Kroll investigation into Capture software

Minister for Services, Small Business and Exports (Gareth Thomas):

[[HCWS318](#)]

Network subsidy uplift and postmaster remuneration

The Government is committed to delivering the manifesto commitment to strengthen the Post Office network. To do this, we intend to take steps that will improve the culture, structure, and organisation of the company. I have announced that the Government will publish a Green Paper in the first half of next year to seek the public's views, insights and experiences to help shape the future of the Post Office. In the meantime, it is important to continue to support the Post Office network and the important services it provides across the country. I can therefore announce that the Government is providing a further £37.5 million of network subsidy this financial year.

Postmasters have raised concerns with me that their income has not kept up with inflation over the past decade. The Government therefore welcomes that the Post Office is going to make a one-off payment to postmasters to increase their remuneration.

Government response to Independent Investigation into Capture Software

I am today publishing the Government response to the independent report conducted by forensic accountant Kroll Associates, into the Post Office Capture software. This can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-investigation-into-capture-government-response>. I have also placed copies in the libraries of both Houses.

Earlier this year, concerns were raised by Parliamentarians and postmasters about the Capture software which was rolled out by the Post Office to some branches in the early 1990s and pre-dated the Horizon IT system. The concerns were that the Capture software had bugs which may have caused shortfalls, leaving postmasters to pay the Post Office back, and that some postmasters may have been prosecuted as a consequence.

In responding to these concerns, the Government committed to publishing the conclusions of the Kroll report as quickly as possible after the investigation concluded. The report was published on 30 September 2024, and an addendum to the report containing additional evidence was published on 18 October 2024. The report concluded there was a reasonable likelihood that Capture could have created shortfalls for postmasters. The Government accepts those findings.

This has come to light thanks to the hard work of postmasters, campaigners and Parliamentarians and the Government is committed to moving swiftly on proposals for delivering redress.

After closely considering the findings and other evidence presented to the Government, including testimony from postmasters, the Government has concluded that postmasters who were adversely impacted by Capture, should be offered redress.

The next step in this process will be to decide how and what form of redress should be offered in the context of Capture, which is distinct from Horizon due to the passage of time and the significant lack of contemporaneous records and evidence.

The Government will develop its proposals, engaging with postmasters and other key stakeholders over the coming months to determine the scope of the financial redress and the eligibility criteria. Financial redress will be offered to postmasters who do not have a criminal conviction or where a court has overturned their conviction.

The Kroll report does not make conclusions on whether Capture led to unsafe convictions. Therefore, the Government is continuing to work with the Criminal Cases Review Commission, Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission and the Post Office on their ongoing investigations into the use of Capture in prosecutions.

I would like to thank postmasters that have come forward so far, and for those who have shared their initial suggestions for redress.

Lastly, I urge all postmasters who may have used Capture and may have experienced shortfalls related to Capture to come forward to the Government to make themselves known. Equally, we welcome family members of any postmasters who have sadly passed away, who believe their relative may have been affected, to come forward.

CABINET OFFICE

■ End of year update on the government response to the Infected Blood Inquiry recommendations

Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): [\[HCWS320\]](#)

The Infected Blood Inquiry's final report was published on 20 May 2024 and made 12 recommendations. The recommendations made by Sir Brian Langstaff are wide-ranging, well considered, and necessarily complex.

In the months since the publication of the Inquiry's report, Parliament has come together a number of times to discuss the infected blood scandal. In the course of those debates, I committed to providing an update on the Government's response to the recommendations by the end of this year. This update fulfils that commitment. Alongside this statement, I am publishing a command paper detailing the full update on gov.uk, and I have requested that copies be deposited in the libraries of the Houses of Parliament.

The Government accepts in full or accepts in principle all of the recommendations made. Where recommendations are accepted in principle, we have sought to explain the rationale for doing so. Many of the recommendations are wide-reaching, and proper implementation needs time to be delivered effectively. The Government has worked to progress implementation and assess the deliverability of each of the recommendations. We are committed to making meaningful change. As per Recommendation 12 of the

Infected Blood Inquiry, I will provide a further final update on the progress made on Inquiry's recommendations by May 2025.

I am grateful to my ministerial colleagues for their co-operation, and in particular my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention at the Department of Health and Social Care for his leadership on the recommendations for which his department is responsible. I am also grateful to Ministers in the devolved governments, in particular the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health in Scotland, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care in Wales and the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland. Their engagement has been invaluable in ensuring that we have as consistent an approach as possible across the whole United Kingdom.

The victims of this scandal have suffered immeasurably. It is my utmost intention to deliver what justice and compensation the Government can as quickly as possible. This government is taking concrete action to deliver on the compensation scheme. The Chancellor announced £11.8bn of funding in the Autumn Budget, and I am pleased to update that the Infected Blood Compensation Authority has been able to make the first payments to the victims of this scandal in the last few days.

Furthermore, I can also confirm today that the Government has also extended its eligibility criteria for siblings for the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme to ensure that the Scheme provides fair compensation to those who have been devastatingly impacted as a result of their sibling's infection.

Under the new definition, siblings of infected people will be eligible if they, while under the age of 18, lived in the same household as an infected person for a period of at least 2 years after the onset of the infection, or would have been expected to live in the same household were it not for the impact of the infection. Siblings in this scenario will receive an Injury Impact Award in line with the severity of the infection, and a Social Impact award of £12,000.

Alternatively, siblings will also be eligible as long as they cohabited, or were expected to cohabit with the infected person were it not for the impact of the infection, for at least 2 years whilst the affected sibling was under the age of 18. This is the case even if that period was prior to the infection, including if the infection happened during adulthood. Siblings in this scenario will receive an Injury Impact Award in line with the severity of the infection, and a Social Impact Award of £8,000. This mirrors the Social Impact Award available to carers, parents (where the onset of a child's infection began after age 18); and children (where the onset of a parent's infection began after their child turned 18).

I hope that both these updates provide the infected blood community with some assurance that we are learning from and acting on the mistakes of the past.

■ **Infected Blood Compensation Authority Contingency Fund Advance**

Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): [\[HCWS321\]](#)

I hereby give notice of the Cabinet Office's intention to seek a Contingencies Fund Advance to make compensation payments to victims of the Infected Blood Scandal.

The Cabinet Office's Capital Annually Managed Expenditure Estimate does not provide funding for compensation payments already approved by Parliament through the Victims and Prisoners Act. This advance will be used to quickly compensate victims of the Infected Blood scandal. While this will be received through the Supplementary Estimate, this advance will enable compensation to be made ahead of Parliament formally approving the ambit and the associated expenditure through an Estimate, in line with the government's commitment.

Parliamentary approval for additional capital of £272,000,000 for this capital will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for Infected Blood Compensation Authority. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £272,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ **Announcing Lead Reviewer for Review of Arts Council England**

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):

[\[HCWS322\]](#)

Today I am announcing the appointment of the Rt Hon the Baroness Hodge of Barking DBE to lead an independent review into the Arts Council England (ACE); the review will commence in the new year.

This government will ensure that the arts and culture will no longer be the preserve of a privileged few. We will also place arts and culture at the heart of our plan for change to deliver growth and break down the barriers to opportunity across the country. This review will ensure that Arts Council England is best positioned to help deliver this and successfully steward our cultural and creative sectors in every part of England, helping to rebuild Britain in a decade of national renewal.

Arts Council England is an executive non-departmental public body, and was established by Royal Charter in 1946. Arts Council England is one of the government's primary vehicles to support the arts in England; its role encompasses funding and investment, research, support and advice to the sector, and partnership promotion. It works in partnership with a broad range of individuals and organisations across artforms and at the local, regional and national levels. Arts Council England is also the national development agency for libraries and museums in England.

Now that Baroness Hodge has agreed to take on the review she will work with myself and Arts Council England to finalise the Terms of Reference which will be published in the new year. However, I expect the review to look at the following areas:

- Exploring ACE's role in supporting excellence across the country, ensuring that everyone is able to participate in and consume culture and creativity, regardless of their background or where they live;
- Exploring how ACE engages with its partners and stakeholders at all levels to ensure that national and local priorities work harmoniously to benefit the public;

- Evaluating ACE's role in developing a strong and vibrant creative sector which supports both grassroots creativity and internationally renowned art;
- Considering ACE's role in the wider cultural funding ecosystem, and mechanisms to strengthen the role of local voices in decision making;
- Examining how the arms length principle is working in relation to the funding of the arts to ensure decisions are taken at the appropriate level;
- Assessing ACE's mandate to ensure it is clear and appropriate for the 21st century and it is able to deliver high quality arts and culture on a national, regional and local level.

Baroness Hodge will be supported by an advisory panel of experts with a range of experiences. We are working to confirm the final list and this will be published in the new year alongside the Terms of Reference.

In conducting the review, she will be supported by a small team of officials. Together they will engage with a broad range of stakeholders in the arts and creative sectors across the UK. This will involve individual meetings, group discussions and a survey so that anyone who wants to contribute can do so.

The review will report to the government in the Autumn of 2025, and the government will publish the conclusions of the review along with the government's response in early 2026.

DEFENCE

■ Developments in Military Housing

Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):

[\[HCWS323\]](#)

I am pleased to confirm that today, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Annington Property Ltd have formally agreed that the MOD will reacquire the 36,000 service family estate homes sold to Annington in 1996.

This agreement reverses one of the most notorious privatisations of the 1990s, with the balance of risk and reward skewed heavily against the public sector. The billions of pounds spent by the MOD on renting back these properties since 1996 could have been better spent on maintaining, improving or rebuilding service family homes.

Estimates suggest the 1996 deal has left the British taxpayer nearly £8 billion worse off - money that could have been used to deliver homes fit for our heroes. In addition to the billions of pounds paid in rent, billions of pounds worth of empty properties have also been handed over to Annington Ltd.

The new deal is a decisive break with the failed approach of the past, which will save the public purse £230 million a year in rental costs: more than £600,000 a day. These important savings to defence pave the way for a substantial improvement and construction programme to provide high quality homes for Armed Forces families. The

deep-set problems with military housing will not be fixed overnight, but this is a major step forward and a demonstration of our Government's intent.

This deal forms part of our growth mission to secure jobs, economic prosperity and housebuilding across the UK, and our commitment to renew the nation's contract with those who serve - boosting morale, retention and recruitment across the Armed Forces.

The opportunity for this landmark deal was presented following a High Court ruling in MOD's favour. This established MOD's legal rights to repurchase the houses from Annington, providing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fix the long-term decline in military housing and deliver homes fit for heroes.

The deal also represents excellent value for money. We are buying the estate for £6 billion, yet the properties are valued at £10.1 billion by Annington when not subject to leases. However, eliminating the liabilities associated with the leases creates budgetary headroom to partially fund this purchase, meaning that the public expenditure impact of this measure, and the impact on public sector net debt, is confined to £1.7 billion.

By contrast, failing to take advantage of this opportunity would have meant rising rental and maintenance costs on properties which in many cases have reached the end of their useful lives.

The taxpayer would have faced a further £5.9 billion costs over the next ten years through ever-increasing rents. Homes with a value of £1.3 billion would also have been returned to a private company.

Problems with the existing deal were recognised by the last Government. In particular the Rt Hon Member for Horsham at the time, Jeremy Quin, who had oversight of the initial core legal challenges. This Government has accelerated this work in recent months across the Ministry of Defence, UK Government Investments and His Majesty's Treasury. We pay tribute to all those who have worked tirelessly to complete this deal.

This announcement comes as the Government starts work on a new military housing strategy, to be published next year. The first steps in the strategy will include the rapid development of an action plan to deliver on the "once in a generation" opportunities unlocked by today's deal. This work will involve independent experts, forces families and cross-government input.

The strategy will help to will deliver a generational renewal of military housing, new opportunities for forces homeownership, and better use of MOD land to support the delivery of affordable homes for families across Britain.

Our Armed Forces make extraordinary sacrifices to keep our country safe. Theirs is the ultimate public service. By ensuring our personnel and their families have the homes they deserve, this work will support the Government's Plan for Change, which is built on the foundation of strong national security. And it will help achieve the Government's milestones on kickstarting economic growth and boosting housebuilding across the country.

Today's announcement demonstrates how our Government is delivering for defence. This is a major step forward towards delivering military housing fit for our heroes.

■ **Reserve Forces and Cadets Association External Scrutiny Report 2024 - Response**
Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns): [\[HCWS326\]](#)

Led by Maj Gen (Retd) Simon Lalor, the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations External Scrutiny Team provides an independent assessment on the health of the Reserve Forces on behalf of the Department. I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the 2024 report, along with a copy of my response to this report. I am most grateful to the Team for their work.

Attachments:

1. [External Scrutiny Team Letter](#) [MS-R9H3P2-20241202-MinVP-letter-template-EST-Annex B-FINAL v2.pdf]
2. [Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations External](#) [20240729-EST_UK Reserves Forces Annual Report_2024.pdf]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

■ **Accelerating to Net Zero: Responding to the CCC Progress Report and delivering the Clean Energy Superpower Mission**

Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): [\[HCWS328\]](#)

Accelerating to net zero offers huge opportunities for Britain. This transition will be one of the economic opportunities of the century – a chance to create hundreds of thousands of good jobs, to drive investment into all parts of the UK, and protect the UK economy from future price shocks that reliance on fossil fuels create. Beyond growth and energy security, the transition to a net zero economy can deliver a range of social and health benefits for people right across the UK. As we act on how we heat our homes and buildings, fuel our transport, and protect our natural world, we can cut fuel poverty, clean up our air, increase access to nature and improve quality of life.

Looking beyond the UK, we also have an important role to play. For example, the UK was the first country to set legally binding carbon budgets and the first major economy to establish a net zero target in law. Now, more than 90% of the world's economy is covered by a net zero commitment. The UK showed leadership again at COP29, where we announced that our 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) headline target will reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% on 1990 levels, excluding international aviation and shipping emissions. This is an ambitious, economy-wide emission reduction target that aligns with the recommendation of the Climate Change Committee (CCC) and carbon budget 6 set by the previous government.

The CCC's 2024 Progress Report to Parliament made clear its view that the previous government was off track and urgent action is needed, and we take these findings seriously. That is why we are taking urgent and ambitious action and why making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the five missions of this Government.

In response to the CCC's 2024 Progress Report, today's publication highlights the achievements that this Government has overseen already and looks forward to upcoming

actions that will be key in reducing our emissions and seizing on the economic opportunities of net zero.

For example, in our first few months in office, we have lifted the de facto onshore wind ban, approved solar projects offering power of almost 2GW, launched Great British Energy, announced investments of over £20bn in CCUS, a new industry for Britain, delivered a record-breaking renewables auction, and set out plans to increase the energy efficiency of rented homes to lift a million households out of fuel poverty.

The action taken so far and our future plans mean that this Government is acting or partially acting on all of the CCC's 35 recommendations to UK Government, with progress proactively being made on the CCC's 35 recommendations for the Devolved Governments.

This is just the beginning. Over the coming months we will set out the next steps for our mission, including publishing a Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, setting out a detailed updated plan to meet our carbon budgets, and setting the pathway to Carbon Budget 7 by June 2026. These future moments will be key in delivering our pathway to net zero, bolstering growth and clean jobs, ensuring energy security, and delivering social and health benefits.

Through mission-driven government we will act with much greater urgency and determination than the past. We will continue to work in partnership with businesses, trade unions, civil society and all levels of government to seize the opportunities of action.

As required by the Climate Change Act 2008, I will place copies of today's publication *Accelerating to Net Zero: Responding to the CCC Progress Report* and delivering the Clean Energy Superpower Mission in the Libraries of the House.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ **Memorandum of Understanding: Investigating healthcare incidents where suspected criminal activity may have contributed to death or serious life-changing harm**

Minister of State for Health (Secondary Care) (Karin Smyth):

[\[HCWS330\]](#)

I am pleased to announce that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) *Investigating healthcare incidents where suspected criminal activity may have contributed to death or serious life-changing harm* was published today on GOV.UK.

This MoU was recommended by Professor Sir Norman Williams' rapid policy review into gross negligence manslaughter in 2018. The Williams review was set up to look at the wider impact of concerns among healthcare professionals that simple errors could result in prosecution for gross negligence manslaughter, even if they happen in the context of broader organisation and system failings.

Following this recommendation, the Department of Health and Social Care consulted with regulatory, investigatory and prosecutorial bodies to develop the new MoU, *Investigating*

healthcare incidents where suspected criminal activity may have contributed to death or serious life-changing harm.

The MoU applies in England and has been formally signed by:

- NHS England
- National Police Chiefs' Council
- Health and Safety Executive
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Care Quality Commission
- General Medical Council
- Nursing and Midwifery Council
- General Dental Council
- Health and Care Professions Council
- General Pharmaceutical Council
- General Optical Council
- General Chiropractic Council
- General Osteopathic Council

The MoU will be used by signatories to help deliver early, co-ordinated and effective action following incidents where there is reasonable suspicion that a patient/service user's death or serious life-changing harm occurred as a result of suspected criminal activity in the course of healthcare delivery.

The MoU specifically delivers on the following recommendations from the Williams review:

- updates and replaces the previous MoU from 2006;
- sets out the roles and responsibilities of the signatories providing a framework for how organisations should work together to ensure a coordinated approach;
- provides advice on communication including liaising with families and the public; and
- supports the development of a 'just culture' in healthcare which recognises the impact of wider systems on the provision of clinical care or care decision making. This includes considering the wider systems in place at the time of the incident, to support a fair and consistent evaluation of the actions of individuals and ensuring expert witnesses consider the effects of the wider systems in place during an incident.

HOME OFFICE**■ Preventing radicalisation**

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): [\[HCWS327\]](#)

Today, I can update the House on the initial steps arising from the counter-extremism sprint initiated by the Government in July, designed to ensure that the UK's strategies and systems to prevent radicalisation are functioning effectively, and addressing the full range of threats that we currently face as a country.

National Security is one of the government's foundations and fundamental to our Plan for Change. We must therefore first and foremost recognise and applaud the continued excellent work carried out by Counter Terrorism Police, security and intelligence agencies, and other experts working on prevention across the country. Since March 2017, MI5 and the police have together disrupted 43 late-stage attack plots.

The UK's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, was established after the terrible attacks on September 11, 2001 and July 7, 2005. Made public in 2006, CONTEST has continued under successive Governments and evolved over years in line with the threat.

The four pillars of that strategy – Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare – are long standing, and set the standard globally for a comprehensive counter-terror response, but the threats that strategy is designed to tackle have also become more complex:

- Islamist terrorism remains the primary threat, followed by extreme right-wing terrorism, and there are an increasing number of cases where the ideological driver is mixed or unclear;
- The internet continues to act as a central enabler of radicalisation, facilitating increasingly easy access to extremist material and like-minded individuals;
- While the majority of previous terrorist incidents have been perpetrated by adults, increasing numbers of young people are being drawn towards violent ideologies; and
- Terrorist groups based overseas continue to present a significant threat to the UK, but the most common manifestation of terrorist risk in the UK in recent years has been cases involving individuals or small groups acting without direct support or instruction from a wider terrorist network. Additionally, the threat landscape is more interconnected and complex than at any time, with terrorist threats interacting with a state threat of unprecedented scale and severity and the challenge of organised crime.

This requires a response from government agencies, law enforcement and the public, which is informed, agile and integrated. As our first response to the Home Office's counter-extremism sprint, I am today setting out action and next steps that will be taken in five key areas.

National Security funding

Firstly, in light of these increasingly complex and rapidly changing threats, law enforcement partners and agencies need appropriate levels of resource. As announced in the Provisional Police Funding Settlement 2025-26, Counter-Terrorism Police funding will increase next year by £140 million (14%) to £1,160 million, ensuring Counter-Terrorism Policing have the resources they need to deal with the threats we face. Separately, the Chancellor confirmed in the Autumn Budget on 13 October an additional £499m funding for the Single Intelligence Account, which includes MI5, SIS and GCHQ, showing our commitment to ensuring our agencies are equipped to do the job.

Youth Diversion Orders

Second, we need new measures to address the growing proportion of young people who are featuring in counter-terrorism casework, as highlighted in the latest official statistics:

- 13 per cent of all those being investigated by MI5 for involvement in UK terrorism are under 18, which is a threefold increase in the last three years
- Arrests of under-18s for terror offences have increased from just three in the year ending September 2010, to thirty two in the year ending September 2024; and
- 11-to-15-year olds now make up 40 per cent of all referrals into Prevent, and half of all cases adopted by Channel where the age is known (up from a third in 2017).

These concerning trends have been flagged by Ken McCallum, Director General of MI5, who said they are “seeing far too many cases where very young people are being drawn into poisonous online extremism”, and by Jonathan Hall KC, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, who has said that “the profile of alleged terrorist offenders is getting younger, and includes children who may accurately be described as vulnerable”.

Most recently, on 5 December, UK Counter Terrorism Policing, working with their Five Eyes counterparts, issued a joint call to action on youth radicalisation, stressing that they are “increasingly concerned about the radicalisation of minors, and minors who support, plan or undertake terrorist activities”.

It is clear that while the UK has a robust counter-terrorism toolkit, including measures to prevent the escalation of terrorist risks, those tools are not currently well-designed for intervention with young people.

The Government therefore intends to introduce Youth Diversion Orders – a new counter-terrorism risk management tool specifically designed for young people, building on recommendations from Jonathan Hall KC.

Police will be able to apply to the Courts for a Youth Diversion Order, permitting them – in partnership with other agencies – to intervene earlier and to impose conditions such as engagement with Prevent interventions or restrictions on online activity. The Courts must deem these conditions to be necessary and proportionate to mitigate terrorist risk.

Strengthening Prevent

Third, we need reforms to strengthen the Prevent programme.

Prevent has been an integral part of our counter-terrorism machinery for the last twenty years, supporting nearly 5,000 people away from radicalisation since the introduction of the statutory Prevent duty in 2015. Over that period, dedicated Counter-Terrorism police and multi-agency partners have worked tirelessly and effectively day-in, day-out to divert individuals away from terrorism.

However, Prevent must continually adapt and improve to deal with challenges and keep pace with the changing nature of the threats that the programme is meant to tackle.

In particular, as backed up by recent reviews and statistics, it is not always clear to practitioners what kinds of cases should be dealt with under Prevent, which should be referred to other services, and what the responsibility of those services should be.

The reforms of recent years, including better training for frontline staff, updated guidance, and a new Prevent Assessment Framework to strengthen decision-making by police and Channel panels, have all sought to address this confusion, but more needs to be done.

Concerns over low numbers of referrals for Islamist extremism have still not been addressed, and at the same time a lack of clarity remains over whether Prevent should be confined to cases of clear ideology or should also be picking up cases where the ideology is less clear, or where there is a fixation with violence.

Therefore, the Home Office is taking forward work in a number of areas, including:

- Conducting an end-to-end review of Prevent thresholds, updating policy and guidance, including on repeat referrals, to ensure they reflect the full range of threats we see today;
- Broadening the interventions available to people supported by the Channel early intervention programme. In addition to ideological mentoring, we will seek to reflect the diverse drivers of radicalisation, by exploring options to support at-risk individuals with cyber skills, family interventions, or practical mentoring, working to reduce the threat of radicalisation in the increasingly complex cases we see;
- Undertaking a strategic policy review to identify and drive improvements in how individuals referred into Prevent who are neurodivergent or suffer from mental ill-health are supported and managed; and
- Strengthening our approach to the monitoring and oversight of referrals that do not meet Prevent thresholds, by launching a pilot in January to test new approaches to cases that are transferred to other services to ensure there is proper monitoring and requirements in place.

Creation of a Prevent Commissioner role

Fourth, we need to ensure there is a means of regularly and robustly checking the effectiveness and quality of the programme in different parts of the country, in line with our wider programme of reform to drive up performance and standards in other areas.

I am therefore announcing today that we have begun a recruitment exercise to appoint an Independent Commissioner of Prevent, with a specific remit to review the programme's effectiveness and identify gaps, so any problems can be fixed early. This will include

ensuring we have robustly implemented recommendations from previous reviews and overseeing delivery and evaluation on the steps I have set out above.

An interim appointment to this role will be announced shortly to enable swift work to begin, and an open and fair recruitment campaign will run in parallel to select a permanent Prevent Commissioner.

Social media and radicalisation online

Finally, we need stronger action to tackle online radicalisation, in the face of growing evidence that the increasingly violent and extreme ideological material that young people in particular are accessing online is transforming the way in which they are radicalised.

In response, we are strengthening action to tackle this online radicalisation and protect our young people from harm. Yesterday Ofcom published new Codes of Practice to drive implementation of the Online Safety Act.

Next steps

In the new year, we will provide further updates on these measures and on action to counter terrorism and extremist radicalisation arising from the counter-extremism sprint and other work underway. We recognise the need for a whole of society approach to confront the threat from terrorism, and that everyone in our society should have the confidence and peace of mind to go about their lives freely and without fear. That requires greater vigilance than ever and stronger action than ever to identify, prevent and relentlessly pursue terrorism and violent extremism wherever it is found.

■ **Provisional Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2025-26**

The Minister of State for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson):

[\[HCWS325\]](#)

My right hon Friend the Home Secretary has today published the Provisional Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2025-26. A copy of the provisional Report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be available on gov.uk. This provisional Report sets out the Home Secretary's determination for 2025-26 of the aggregate amounts of grants that she proposes to pay under section 46(2) of the Police Act 1996. The final Report will be laid before the House in the new year following the period of consultation.

Today, the Government has set out the provisional police funding settlement in Parliament for the forthcoming financial year. I am pleased to announce that, for 2025-26, funding to police forces will total up to £17.4 billion, an increase of up to £986.9 million when compared to the 2024-25 police funding settlement – a significant increase, and more than the increase set out for 2024-25. This settlement represents a real terms increase in force funding of 3.5%, and a cash increase of 6.0%. The additional funding confirmed through this settlement will cover the costs of the police officer pay awards and fund the recruitment and redeployment of more neighbourhood police and PSCOs.

Overall funding for the policing system in England and Wales, including to police forces and wider system funding, will be up to £19.5 billion, an increase of up to £1.0 billion when compared to the 2024-25 funding settlement, representing a real terms funding

increase of 3.0% and a cash increase of 5.5%. The investments announced today are in addition to the provision of one-off funding of £175.0 million we announced in July to support the costs of the 24-25 pay award. Taken together this significant investment reflect this government's commitment to restoring confidence in policing and boosting neighbourhood policing, by providing them with the resources they need to invest in their frontline workforce.

Of the £986.9 million of additional funding for police forces, I can confirm that £657.1 million of this is an increase to government grants, which includes an increase in the core grants of £339.0 million to ensure police forces are fully equipped to deliver our Safer Streets Mission. This also includes £230.3 million to compensate territorial forces for the costs of the change to the employer National Insurance Contributions from 2025-26, and an additional £100.0 million to kickstart the first phase of 13,000 additional police officers, PCSOs and special constables into neighbourhood policing roles. This will provide policing with the funding required to tackle crime and keep communities safe.

As set out in the Local Government policy statement of 28th November, PCCs will have the flexibility to raise the police precept to £14 for a Band D property in 2025-26. This could generate up to £329.8 million of additional funding available to police forces compared with 2024-25. This strikes the balance between protecting taxpayers and providing funding for police forces.

We recognise that the Metropolitan Police Service faces increased demands on resources from policing the capital city. Despite this, the National and International Capital City grant has not increased in line with inflation for at least five years and there has been a substantial increase in protest activity in London in recent years. Therefore, as part of the 2025-26 police funding settlement, the Metropolitan Police and City of London Police forces will receive £255.2 million through the National and International Capital City grant; an increase of £65 million when compared to the 2024-25 settlement, equating to a 34.2% cash increase and 31.1% real terms increase.

Attached are accompanying tables that outline how we propose to allocate this funding settlement across various funding streams and local policing bodies for 2025-26.

Today, this Government has confirmed significant increase in funding for police forces. In return, we expect police forces to raise their ambition on efficiencies and drive forward improvements to productivity while helping us deliver on our mission to create safer streets. To enable this, we have launched the Commercial Efficiencies and Collaboration Programme which will initially focus on national buying and frameworks and cost recovery. We are determined to work with policing to maximise the potential of productivity and innovation, ensuring officers are equipped with the tools they need to keep our communities safe and to deliver our mission.

We expect policing to approach the 2025-26 financial year with a focus on delivering the government's priorities, as set out in the Prime Minister's Plan for Change:

- Increasing the number of officers, PCSOs and special constables in neighbourhood policing teams;

- Tackling violence against women and girls;
- Reducing knife crime;
- Cracking down on antisocial behaviour;
- And by doing these things, increasing public confidence in policing.

In 2025-26, we will be allocating £376.8 million to support forces to maintain officer numbers.

This government is committed to increasing policing visibility to protect our communities and restore confidence in policing. To support delivery of our Safer Streets mission, our priority is to increase neighbourhood policing roles.

We are grateful to those forces who have gone above and beyond in recruiting additional officers to maximise the strength of their workforce. We expect that these forces prioritise maintaining these officer numbers and have provided funding to achieve this.

Police forces will still be expected to meet officer number targets in return for funding. However, the Home Office has listened to feedback from forces on the need for increased flexibility to help forces manage their finances. We have therefore rebalanced the funding available in core grant and the ringfence for the purpose of maintaining officers for 2025-26.

As well as investing in maintaining police officers, this Government is committed to going further. As part of our pledge to increase policing visibility, improve public perceptions of the police, and create safer streets for our communities, we are providing a £100.0 million investment for neighbourhood policing. This will fund the recruitment of additional and redeployed neighbourhood police officers, PCSOs and Special Constables in 25-26. This will form part of a multi-year programme, and kickstart the delivery in 2025-26 of these additional neighbourhood personnel over the course of this parliament.

The increase in neighbourhood policing will be done in a way that prioritises forces' operational flexibility. Forces will be allocated funding and propose a planned workforce increase and mix that works best for the communities that they serve. This funding will help forces deliver our neighbourhood policing guarantee, including the restoration of patrols to town centres giving every community a named officer to turn to, and introducing stronger tools for police to tackle persistent anti-social behaviour.

It is essential that we maximise the value of any new investment within policing. We are driving work to reduce inefficiencies and maximise productivity, freeing cashable savings and officer time to reinvest in frontline activities. We will require forces to participate in the recently announced Commercial Efficiencies and Collaboration Programme, starting by forces signing up to national approaches to buying energy, vehicles, fuel, temporary staff and software licenses. We will work with policing to develop this programme, to unlock immediate cost savings and laying the foundations to deliver hundreds of millions of pounds of efficiency savings by the end of this Parliament.

The programme will initially target several priority areas. These include:

- Fleet – Require better use of existing frameworks and working with policing to standardise requirements enabling better value and reducing full life costs.
- Energy - working with the sector to ensure policing can harness wider purchasing power across government and wider public sector.
- ICT - ending the variation in prices for software contracts and then moving to smarter purchasing in other areas of technology.

We will build on the foundations of the Policing Productivity Review to tackle bureaucracy, free up officer time for redeployment onto the frontline and improve outcomes. Such as working to eliminate any wasteful and unnecessary redaction of files passing between the police and the CPS or supporting the roll out of Enhanced and Rapid Video Responses to improve response times and victim outcomes.

The review also highlighted that embedding productivity into the culture of policing can ensure that improvements are made to unlock non cashable and cashable savings. The effective roll out of this technology is of vital importance to achieve these benefits and we will work closely with the College of Policing to provide implementation and business change support for forces to implement promising and proven technologies, provide a blueprint for measuring those benefits and demonstrate how to best reinvest time saved into delivery of the neighbourhood policing guarantee.

Firearms licensing fees have not increased since 2015 and are now significantly less than the cost of the service provided by police forces. This funding deficit is impacting the effectiveness of police firearms licensing controls and the crucial role they play in safeguarding the public. We therefore intend to lay a statutory instrument when parliamentary time allows to increase firearms licensing fees to provide full-cost recovery for police forces, in line with our manifesto commitment. The additional revenue raised will be retained by police forces to support the important improvements needed in firearms licensing.

In a written ministerial statement on 19th November ([HCWS232](#)), the Home Secretary set out some of the core components of our long-term plans for necessary and overdue police reforms. This will be a joint programme of work between Government and policing in recognition that the challenge of rebuilding confidence is a shared one, and we will work closely with policing over the coming months to develop the detail of the proposals. Working closely, and in partnership with, policing, we will publish a Police Reform White Paper in the Spring, outlining our plans for bold and comprehensive reforms to the policing system. The funding set out today reflects government's investment in policing and commitment to ensuring forces have adequate resources to protect the public.

To drive excellence across policing, we will consult with police system leaders on plans for a new National Centre of Policing. While work is underway to determine the scope and scale of the unit, it is expected to include specialist and supportive functions like forensics, aviation and IT, which have become fragmented and underpowered over the last decade. National arrangements on procurement will also generate savings to reinvest into frontline policing.

To drive up performance and standards and ensure communities can have confidence in their local police force, a new Performance Unit will be established in the Home Office. The Unit will harness national data to monitor performance and direct improvements, underpinned by a performance framework developed with the College of Policing, policing inspectorate (HMICFRS), National Police Chiefs' Council and PCCs.

This government recognises that police forces must have the right systems, capabilities, and support in place to support us on meeting our mission. This settlement includes £914.3 million for the wider policing system, which:

- Maintains the police settlement's investment in tackling Serious Violence and County Lines next year, ensuring the continuation of Violence Reduction Units and supporting all forces in their ongoing work to close county lines.
- Ensures the continuation of Major Law Enforcement Programmes which will modernise national mission-critical systems, without which policing cannot operate effectively, tackle a range of threats and make our streets safer.
- Supports police efficiency and collaboration by investing in national policing capabilities. This funding establishes the new Commercial Efficiency and Collaboration Programme, maintains the digital routes through which members of the public can contact the police, and supports the implementation of digital evidence sharing across the criminal justice system.
- Supports law enforcement in tackling serious and organised crime by investing in Regional Organised Crime Units, ensuring they are supported in tackling some of the highest harm threats.

This does not represent the Government's total investment in the policing system and law enforcement. In 2025-26, funding for areas including Arms-Length Bodies, Cyber Crime, Forensics, Fraud, Police Productivity and Innovation and Tackling Exploitation and Abuse (including Violence against Women and Girls) will be decided as part of the Home Office's wider budget allocation process, with funding arrangements for specific programmes confirmed in due course.

Ensuring national security is the first duty of any government. This government will provide essential support for Counter-Terrorism Policing, ensuring that they have the resources they need to deal with the threats we face. Funding for Counter-Terrorism Policing will increase by £140.0 million to £1.2 billion, which includes funding to compensate for the cost of the employer National Insurance Contribution changes. PCCs will be notified separately of force-level funding allocations for CT Policing, which will not be made public for security reasons.

The provisional funding allocations set out in today's report reflect this government's commitment to working with policing and giving it the resources required to bridge the gap between policing and our communities. This is critical for restoring the public sense of safety on our streets.

We understand that funding certainty is crucial for effective financial planning across police forces. Funding for future years will be agreed in Phase 2 of the forthcoming Spending Review. Police reform proposals will be developed alongside this.

Finally, I must use this opportunity to pay tribute to and thank our committed officers and police staff for the remarkable dedication, courage and resilience they show every day to keep this country safe. This investment today is an investment in these brave men and women. We look forward to working with officers and police staff across the country on our shared ambition to make our streets safer.

Attachments:

1. [Tables](#) [WMS - Provisional Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2025-26 - Tables.pdf]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Development and the environment

Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Matthew Pennycook): [\[HCWS317\]](#)

Development and the environment

The government is determined to rebuild Britain, delivering on our hugely ambitious Plan for Change milestones of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes and fast-tracking 150 planning decisions on major infrastructure by the end of this Parliament. At the same time, we are committed to supporting nature recovery and delivering on the Environment Act.

When it comes to development and the environment, we know we can do better than the status quo, which too often sees both sustainable housebuilding and nature recovery stall. Instead of environmental protections being seen as a barrier to growth, we want to unlock a win-win for the economy and for nature.

In the King's Speech, we set out our intention to use development to fund nature recovery, delivering necessary changes through legislation where we can confirm to Parliament that the steps we are taking will deliver positive environmental outcomes.

With a view to progressing policy development in advance of the publication of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill next year, the government has published a working paper inviting views on a proposed new approach to accelerate housing and infrastructure development whilst going beyond offsetting harm to drive forward nature recovery.

In developing this working paper, the government has engaged constructively with representatives of the development industry, nature conservation organisations, nature service providers, and local government. The approach proposed has benefited considerably from the valuable feedback received and we intend to continue to work closely with key stakeholders as we continue to refine our thinking in this area.

That the status quo is producing sub-optimal outcomes is not in dispute. There is a widespread consensus that it is deterring planning applications and hindering the pace at

which development can be delivered, while at the same time failing to maximise benefits for nature.

The challenges relating to nutrient neutrality are a case in point. An estimated 8% of new housing supply – equating to approximately 16,500 dwellings per year based on recent housing output levels – has historically been delivered in sensitive river catchments subject to nutrient neutrality requirements flowing from the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

There is widespread evidence that such requirements are unnecessarily deterring planning applications and hindering the pace at which homes and infrastructure in these catchment areas can be delivered. The current arrangement requires costly site by site mitigation for each new development and even where mitigation measures are available, obligations currently have to be assessed and secured on a project-by-project basis that often fails to secure optimal environmental outcomes.

Alongside taking robust regulatory and policy action to address pollution and environmental harm at source, the government therefore wants to take a more strategic approach to enable development to proceed where it is needed, while delivering more effectively for nature.

Such an approach would entail moving responsibility for identifying actions to address the environmental impacts of development away from multiple, project-specific assessments in an area and toward a single strategic assessment and delivery plan implemented at the right spatial scale.

Without reducing the level of environmental protection provided for in existing law, we believe this approach, if taken forward, would provide a more efficient and effective way to deliver on the outcomes that the Habitats Regulations and other environmental obligations aspire to achieve.

In adopting this more strategic approach, which will enable the delivery of tens of thousands of new homes alongside new infrastructure, we are seeking to:

1. take a holistic view of nature recovery to secure better environmental outcomes, in line with our Environment Act targets;
2. go beyond offsetting environmental impacts and instead use development to drive nature recovery;
3. drive efficiency and reduce duplication of effort to ensure every pound spent is helping to deliver our environmental goals;
4. make it far easier for developers to discharge a range of environmental obligations, with the legal certainty necessary to underpin substantial capital investment;
5. give delivery partners the tools they need to generate positive outcomes for nature, empowering them to make the right choices to deliver nature recovery;
6. establish a robust and transparent framework to monitor delivery of environmental outcomes; and

7. create a lasting legacy of environmental improvement that will promote better public health through increased access to high quality green spaces.

We want to meet these objectives by taking three steps for which the Planning and Infrastructure Bill would provide the necessary legislative underpinning:

1. Moving responsibility for identifying actions to address environmental impacts away from multiple project-specific assessments in an area to a single strategic assessment and delivery plan. This will allow action to address environmental impacts from development to be taken strategically, at an appropriate geographic scale, rather than at the level of an individual project – while recognising the importance of protecting local communities' access to nature and green space.
1. Moving more responsibility for planning and implementing these strategic actions onto the state, delivered through organisations with the right expertise and with the necessary flexibility to take actions that most effectively deliver positive outcomes for nature.
1. In turn, allowing impacts to be dealt with strategically in exchange for a financial payment that helps fund strategic actions, so development can proceed more quickly. Project-level environmental assessments are then limited only to those harms not dealt with strategically.

In due course, our proposed approach would be supported by the new framework of Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs) that will replace the current systems of environmental assessment with a more effective and outcome-focused tool for managing the effects of development on the natural environment.

As we seek to refine our new approach, we recognise the importance of continuing to deliver nutrient mitigation schemes, including via the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund and Natural England's Nutrient Mitigation Scheme. In this vein, we also intend to continue to support the delivery of strategic measures such as District Level Licensing and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces, as well providing ongoing support for local authorities through the Planning Advisory Service.

Shifting to a strategic and more outcomes-focused approach to impact assessment and nature recovery has the potential to support the environment as well as helping us deliver the housing and infrastructure we need, unlocking a win-win for the economy and nature. We look forward to receiving views on the options set out in the working paper.

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

■ AI and Copyright Consultation

Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant): [\[HCWS324\]](#)

The fast-paced development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and in particular the need for large volumes of data during training of Large Language Models (LLMs), has led to increased scrutiny of the way that copyright law applies to such activity.

It has become clear that rights holders are finding it difficult to control the use of their works in the training of AI models and seek greater ability to control their use and/or be remunerated for it. AI developers are similarly finding it difficult to navigate copyright law in the UK, which affects investment in and adoption of AI technology.

AI technology has enormous potential to drive economic growth, through productivity improvements and technological innovation, and to stimulate more effective public service design and delivery. These are opportunities that the United Kingdom cannot afford to miss and that is why AI, alongside other technologies, will support the delivery of our five national missions.

The UK is also home to world leading creative industries, which has been identified as a growth-driving sector in the government's Industrial Strategy. Supporting their continued success is vital to our national mission to grow our economy, as well as safeguarding our culture and identity.

At present, the application of UK copyright law to the training of AI models is disputed. This uncertainty is holding back innovation and undermining growth in our AI sector and creative industries.

We believe that action is needed now. That is why we are today publishing a consultation on how we can deliver a viable solution that achieves our key objectives for the AI and creative industry sectors. These are:

- To support rights holders to continue to exercise control over use of their content and ability to seek remuneration for its use,
- To promote greater trust and transparency between the sectors, and
- To support the development of world-leading AI models in the UK by ensuring wide and lawful access to high-quality data.

The consultation published today jointly by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, sets out a package of interventions that we believe could address the needs of both sectors.

The proposals include a mechanism for rights holders to reserve their rights, enabling them to license and be paid for the use of their work in AI training. Alongside this, we propose an exception to support use at scale of a wide range of material by AI developers where rights have not been reserved. We are conscious that this combination will only work if a workable technical system of rights reservation can be brought in.

The consultation also includes proposals to support greater transparency from AI developers about what material they are using and how they acquire it, and measures to ensure that rights can be reserved easily, and right holders' decisions can be enforced. It also considers several issues relating to the outputs of generative AI. These include questions about labelling of AI-created outputs and the extent to which they should be protected by copyright, as well as questions about digital replicas where AI is used to generate material that mimics the voice or appearance of existing performers.

Our aim is to find a balance that supports growth in both the AI and creative industries sector, by providing a clear and simple legal basis for access to large volumes of data for training purposes, while enabling rights holders to exert control and secure payment. Our hope is that the eventual solution will provide clear routes to licensing of intellectual property and legal certainty for all.

We very much welcome responses to the consultation from creators, copyright owners, AI developers and technology users. We look forward to receiving feedback through the consultation on whether the proposals achieve this balance.

TRANSPORT

■ Development Consent Order planning

Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander):

[\[HCWS329\]](#)

This statement confirms that it has been necessary to extend the deadline for the decision for the London Luton Airport Development Consent Order under the Planning Act 2008.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, a decision must be made within 3 months of receipt of the Examining Authority's report unless the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline is exercised and a Statement is made to Parliament announcing the new deadline.

The Examining Authority's report on the London Luton Airport Development Consent Order application was received on 10 May 2024. The current deadline for a decision is 3 January 2025, having been extended by way of Written Ministerial Statements from the original deadline of 10 August 2024. The deadline for the decision is to be further extended to 3 April 2025 (an extension of 3 months). The reason for the extension is to allow the newly appointed Secretary of State appropriate time to fully consider this complex application before making a final determination. The Department will however endeavour to issue a decision ahead of the deadline above where possible.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the final decision on whether to give development consent for the above application.

■ Report to Parliament on High Speed Two

Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander):

[\[HCWS331\]](#)

I am today announcing the publication of the first report to Parliament on the progress of High-Speed Two from this Government.

This new Government is committed to transparency on HS2 and keeping Parliamentarians informed of both the issues the programme is facing, the position we have inherited and its progress towards delivering rail capacity and passenger benefits between London and the West Midlands (Phase One). Since coming into Government, we announced urgent measures to get a grip on HS2's costs and ensure taxpayers' money is put to good use and we will be working closely with the new CEO, Mark Wild, to

deliver the remaining work as cost effectively as possible, including setting a realistic budget and schedule.

HS2 Phase One is a vital part of the Government's mission to rebuild Britain, and the Government has been clear that we need to deliver infrastructure that works for the whole country. Right now HS2 supports 31,000 jobs and when completed, it will give faster, more reliable and frequent rail services between the West Midlands and London promoting economic growth and opportunities for workers, releasing capacity to meet increasing demand on regional and local services, and stimulating new jobs and houses around its new stations in Birmingham, Solihull and London.

This report, which covers data reported by HS2 Ltd to the end of September 2024, provides information about the key decisions taken since the new Government was formed in July, and the progress made in delivering Phase One. The Government intends to publish these updates broadly every six months.

I will place a copy of the full report in the Libraries of both Houses. This will also be available on www.gov.uk